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**Increasing operational performance of a Human Resources
Department through improving the managing of the
relationships and interactions :
A Systems Approach**

ACTION RESEARCH LEARNING PROJECT

**Increasing operational performance of a Human Resources
Department through improving the managing of the
relationships and interactions :
A Systems Approach**

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PURPOSE OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Enhancing interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration for higher operational efficiency through improving the managing of interrelations, interconnectivity and interaction within a Human Resources Department. This is a critical systems approach to organising.

An Action Research Study Project presented to the School of Engineering Management at the University of Cape Town in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Industrial Administration.

By

Barend Jacobus Gouws

Study Promoter : Professor T. Ryan

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PREFACE

Operational efficiency requires, *inter-alia*, efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration within a system. This, however, demands a proper management of interrelationships and interactions between the different functions of the system. However, the emergence of interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration would appear to be dependent on more than simply the provision of a technical infrastructure. It also requires a fundamental change in the way people think and act. This necessitates the restructuring of relationships. As organisations are primarily constituted through the interaction of people within their operational domains and, as the qualities of these interactions are dependable on the network of relationships, it is essential that the relationship network also be reconstructed.

Relationships are embedded in the minds of people and, therefore, in order to ensure that reductionist thinking is being transformed into collaborative thinking, the cognitive mindset of the persons involved in the system also has to change. The social system of the human interactivity network needs to be reconstructed into an integrated network of relationships. This integrated relationship network becomes the nervous system of the reconfigurable organisation.

Systems thinking can provide the answer to the question "How do I fundamentally change the way I manage my organisations?" Systems thinking can assist in the structuring of an integrated systemic organisation with a multi-functional focus. Operational efficiency requires efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration which demands a well designed systemic technical structure as well as thoroughly designed social or relational structure promoting collaborative work-processes. This collaborative network or relational structure has been achieved through the design of a systemic learning framework within which process units, called S1-operational teams, operate. These S1-operational teams ensure the necessary interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration and enhance the Human Resources Department's capacity to reconfigure itself in order to manage change properly.

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Barry Gouws

DECLARATION

I, Barend Jacobus Gouws declare that this mini-thesis is my own original work and that all sources have been accurately repeated and acknowledged.

Signed by candidate

BJ Gouws

10 MARCH 2000

Date

PART 1 :

**UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM SITUATION
AND FORMULATING THE PROBLEM**

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM SITUATION AND FORMULATING THE PROBLEM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In a social system effective relationships are essential for operational performance. This requires that the relationships, and interactions flowing from the relationships, be properly managed. Relationships directly influence interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. The efficient management of relationships and interactions necessitates that the interconnectivity and interrelationships between the different parts of the system be carefully designed.

It is, however, not enough to only give attention to the structural aspect of relationships within a system. Organisations are primarily constructed in people's operational domains through their interactions. This implies that people cognitively construct their own organisations and, if relationships and interactions need to be restructured, sufficient attention also has to be given to a cognitive restructuring process. The cognitive mindset of reductionist thinking has to be transformed into a mindset or mental model of interconnected and interdependent relationships. This mental or cognitive restructuring requires a systems thinking approach.

The operational performance of a Human Resources Department is highly dependent on constructive relationships and effective collaborative work-processes. The team members have to synergistically build upon each others work and align individual work with that of the other team members in order to ensure the necessary collaborative work-processes and interactions.

Human Resources management is an interdisciplinary and inter-functional field, and for operational effectiveness, it requires a community of practice which recognises this interdisciplinary and inter-functionality. This integration process requires a systems learning framework, i.e., a systems framework which serves as a mechanism for people to engage their collective thinking and action into a process of collective learning. This systems learning framework can also provide the answer to the question "What is required to bring about change in how people relate to each other?"

The aim of this research project is to enhance interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration within a Human Resources Department in order to achieve higher operational efficiency. Interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration can be achieved through the constructive management of relationships and interactions within a specific system. The more efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration is, the lesser the need for coordinating on a managerial level.

In chapter one I explain what the problem situation is, what my concern is within the situation, what question's flow from this concern and why systems thinking as a theory and action research as a research methodology have been chosen. I also discuss the evaluation of the results achieved.

1.2 PROBLEM SITUATION

Recently much debate has surfaced on the issue of "should we do away with the Human Resources function?' This question arises out of serious and widespread doubts about the Human Resources function and its contribution to organisational performance. "I must agree that there is a good reason for the Human Resource's beleaguered reputation. It is often ineffective, incompetent and costly, in a phrase, it is value sapping. Indeed, if Human Resources were to remain configured as it is today in many companies, I would have to answer the question above with a resounding 'Yes - abolish the thing.'" *Urich (1998 : 29).*

As a Human Resources professional and a manager of a Human Resources Department , I must ask "How relevant is this question to my situation?" and "What value does the Human Resources function add to the operational effectiveness of the organisation?"

My action research study has taken place in the Human Resources Department of the Blaauwberg Municipality. The Blaauwberg Municipality is a sphere of Government and like many other organisations in South Africa, is in the midst of a severe transformation process. The Human Resources Department is a key actor in this transformation process and, therefore, has to ensure the effective implementation of various legislation such as:

- the Employment Equity Act
- the Skills Development Act
- the Labour Relations Act
- the Basic Conditions of Employment Act
- the Occupational Health and Safety Act
- various National and Metropolitan agreements

In addition to the above, the Human Resources Department is responsible for the administration of five different sets of conditions of service and all issues relating to the restructuring and amalgamation of the organisation, thus in essence - transformation. The Human Resources Department, therefore, plays a key role in designing and implementing change management processes. The Human Resources Department is divided hierarchically into eight functional units, these being :

- personnel administration
- recruitment and selection
- education, training and development
- occupational health and safety
- well-being of staff
- organisational improvement (organisation and work-study)
- labour relations
- employment equity

As manager of a Human Resources Department I have the responsibility of supporting and giving guidance and direction to our operational managers with regard to the organisational transformation processes in addition to managing the transformation of my own department. The Human Resources Department employs twenty staff members who, due to the restructuring of Local Government, come from different municipalities bringing their own cultures into the Human Resources Department. We render support and guidance to thirty-two senior managers and one thousand four hundred and ninety employees.

My ethnographic study, which has been done over a period of four months, provides clear evidence that I cannot accept the status quo because the result will be that the Human Resources Department will fail to meet its goals. My staff are working in hierarchical (functional) silos due to the formal functional structure. The majority of them are also professional officials who have a tendency to work independently. As the manager of the Department, I am overburdened with duties involving the coordination which causes me to neglect my development and strategic roles which are also part of my job description. It is also my experience that when a functional specialist proposes a certain solution to a specific problem, other functionaries who do have an interrelation with this specific function are not consulted. This is indicative of a systemic problem on the one hand and the protection of a comfort zone on the other.

There was a lack of understanding of how the different functions within the Human Resources Department interrelate and are interdependent from each other, i.e., there is not a proper understanding of the value-chain within the Human Resources Department. My request that the staff must work more closely together did not bring forward the necessary interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration which is fundamental for high quality of services and efficiency within the Human Resources Department. Cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration are essential for exemplifying the axiom "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". The problem is, therefore, intrinsically based on relationships and interdependencies. Further to this, my staff tends to focus more on inputs and not on outputs. When the question of "What value does your function add to line management?" was asked to them, their answers were very much input focused.

1.3 THE CONCERN

The key concern which emerged from my ethnographic research was that the different functions within my Human Resources Department do not function as a system. The main reasons for this are :

- 1) the staff do not understand how their specific functions interconnect and are interdependent on other functions within the system;
- 2) as manager and leader of the team, I continually have to refer functional specialists to their team members within functional units within the Human Resources System;
- 3) the different functional units operate independently from one another due to the functional structure they operate within. The effects of this are :
 - a lack of effective collaborative work processes;
 - time consuming coordination which reduces me as a leader to function at an “operational level”;
 - poor or nonexistent teamwork; and
 - managing of “events” which result in fragmentation.

1.4 QUESTIONS FORTHCOMING FROM PROBLEM SITUATION AND CONCERN

Forthcoming from the problem situation and concern I ask myself the following questions:

- 1.4.1 How can I improve the operational effectiveness of my department?
- 1.4.2 How can I improve my management of the interrelationships, functional interdependencies and interactions within this system?
- 1.4.3 How can I structure the team's interconnectivity in order to enhance teamwork but not threaten professional individualism?
- 1.4.4 How can I improve the interplay between my staff's autonomous actions and their roles as observers of these interactions and prevent fragmented learning?
- 1.4.5 What kind of organisational structure will best support interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration?

- 1.4.6 What is required to bring about changes in how my staff relate to each other?

1.5 PROBLEM FORMULATION : WHY WAS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT DONE ?

The operational inefficiency within the department and the time-consuming coordinating problem at the level of the manager is fundamentally due to a lack of efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. The interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration problem seems to originate from the hierarchical structure we are operating in as well as a weak social system in terms of interrelationships, functional interdependencies and interactions. The purpose of this research project was to develop and implement a systemic learning organisational structure or configuration (a relational structure) which supports efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration for higher operational efficiency.

1.6 WHY ACTION RESEARCH ?

Action research is a methodology that addresses whole system issues which are invariably multi-variate, and it is an effective approach within a holistic rather than a reductionist framework. It also seeks to influence the phenomena being studied during the action research process itself, in the belief that the true actions of a social system become more evident when you seek to make changes to it. It is also emergent in nature - meaning it emerges progressively, influenced by the events that take place during the research project and by the progressive analyses that are made. Action research combines theory with practice and it is directly related to current operating procedures and problems. Action research involves all my staff, it stimulates new paradigms and fresh approaches and, in the process, fosters collaboration and teamwork. Due to its critical reflective nature, action research links design with implementation which makes it a very effective change methodology.

Further to improving the operational efficiency of my department, the other reasons for doing this study were to improve my own practice as leader and manager, and also to develop a culture of co-management for the Human Resources Department. Because this process in itself is a transformation process, I can, therefore, also critically reflect on how I can improve my practice as a transformational leader. As I proceed with my research, I specifically give more attention to the aspect of transformational learning. Any learning or change process deals with thought processes, feelings, values and attitudes. "Fundamentally it is a process of 'cognitive restructuring'" *Shein (1999 : 4)*. A cognitive activity is an activity of interpreting, understanding and making sense. Any person or business makes sense of the work in unique ways which are provided by the perspective of its particular identity. It is, therefore, important that the person driving the change process provides a structure for interpretation. Change is an ongoing process of becoming and is, therefore, a subject of interpretation. It is necessary to enhance

the ability of the persons involved in the change as a whole; to sense, interpret and commit themselves to the change process.

Lewin stresses the importance of understanding the functioning of a system, specifically that it is through our interventions that we improve our understanding of the system (*Shein 1999 : 7*). It is important not to separate diagnoses from intervention as this will lead to a separation between the researcher and the researched. Action research links intervention with diagnoses.

1.7 WHY SYSTEMS THINKING FOR PROBLEM SOLVING ?

1.7.1 A proper understanding by the people involved in the system of what the purpose of the system is and how the different operational units are systemically interconnected, will bring about sustainable improvement in organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Improving operational efficiency requires that relationships and interactions within the system are being effectively managed. Only once the people are taught how a system is systemically interconnected and have a clear mental construct of these relationships and inter activities, will it be possible for them to work cooperatively and as a team. A cybernetic systems approach has been used as cybernetics focuses on how systems function that is to say how they control their actions and how they communicate with other systems or with their own components. Structures and functions cannot be understood in separation. The research process was also supplemented with transformational learning because if there is no learning there is no transformation. Learning and thinking are two key ingredients for effective transformation.

1.7.2 Operational efficiency can only be improved if the people involved in the system have a clear understanding of the importance of the reciprocal relationships involved and develop the ability to think beyond the level of the individual. The operators' culture is based on human interaction and it must be realised that high levels of communication, trust and teamwork are essential to getting work done effectively and efficiently. Organisations are constituted by the peoples' moment-to-moment interactions within their operational domains and, it is through these interactions that relationships are formed. Only if the relationship's mental construct is well defined and shared by all participants, will there be effective coordinating of actions. A cognitive restructuring of the current mental construct is required to create a sustainable community of practice between thinking and action. This mental construct must be built in such a way that the professionals' autonomy remains un-compromised, with a balance between individualism and team work or collaborative practices. The power relation of the embedded operational structure as language by the participants has to be purposefully addressed before new sustainable close social networks of interactions can be

created. These will then promote and ensure cross-functional work-processes.

- 1.7.3 Improving the managing of relationships and interactions requires not only a well designed technical structure, but also a change in thinking. Therefore, the cognitive mindset of people involved in the system must be purposefully addressed in order to achieve the quality of operational effectiveness and efficiency that is required. The theory of systems thinking provides a powerful way to achieve this change in one's cognitive mindset.
- 1.7.4 The organisation or system functions through a chain of activities involving many people in constant action and interaction. There is a need for structures which enable members of the organisation to create and run their own spaces of autonomy in ways that cohere with the purpose of the larger organisation. This requires the creation of autonomous units within other autonomous units in order to properly manage organisational task complexity. Systems thinking is a theory which assists in understanding complexity within organisations.
- 1.7.5 It is important to create structures within which organisational actors can self-construct an operational domain allowing their own space for actions, while at the same time creating cohesion between autonomous units in working toward a consensual purpose of the larger organisation.
- 1.7.6 Hierarchical structure presents a crucial roadblock to organisational improvement efforts. Despite substantial reference to the effectiveness and efficiency of hierarchical in comparison to matrix organisations, both of these organisational structures have a history of failure. People operating within hierarchical structures tend to become trapped in reductionist thinking. On the other hand, people whom work in a matrix organisation can feel a loss of identity and are too dependent on others for achieving their objectives. Within each of these structures the deep underlying issue of power relations creates its own frames of thinking and actions which are based therein. Both structures lack a fundamental basis and that is systems thinking.
- 1.7.7 The management of relationships and interactions require a systems approach to organisational design and development. Systemic development requires the development of systems thinking, and if the people involved in the system understand the systemic function of that system, real empowerment will occur which will result in enhancing the management of internal operations, i.e., better controlling and coordinating of internal operations.
- 1.7.8 The challenges facing today's businesses demand speedy responses, rapid learning and teamwork. The fast changing demand of an ever more complex operating environment creates an urgent need for new

organisational paradigms and innovative management models. To be successful in such an environment, effective and collaborative work-processes has to be implemented and sustained, firstly amongst the Human Resource professionals and also with the operating line managers of the different functional areas. Operational effectiveness, like productivity improvement, is synonymous with the notion of continuous improvement. Collaborative work-processes, *inter alia*, require cross-functional collaboration as well as interpersonal collaboration.

1.8 EVALUATION OF RESULTS

- 1.8.1 At the end of this project there was a really visible improvement in the team's interactions and relationships. The team members are now constantly aware of how their operational domains interconnect with other operational domains. Self management, due to improved interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration, is at a higher level.
- 1.8.2 The level of team support has increased and there is now an awareness of when to act alone and when to act in conjunction with others. The interactions between my staff's operational domains are more constructive, and their willingness to accept co-responsibility for the governance of the Human Resources Department has increased.
- 1.8.3 The process followed also encouraged transformative learning as the team members are empowered to add value to other departments which are facing the same problems.
- 1.8.4 The limitations of hierarchical and matrix organisations can be overcome if they are supplemented with systems thinking. The systems theory provides the necessary theoretical framework to rethink interdependencies and interrelationships within a specific system. Further to this, if the people involved in a specific system understand that it is these interdependencies that are fundamentally responsible for the belief that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," there will be greater willingness to work for the whole instead of protecting a specific comfort zone.
- 1.8.5 In solving problems it is very important to give sufficient attention to both the technical as well as the nontechnical aspect of the problem. To be successful in any change effort, sufficient attention has to be given to the cognitive mindset of the people involved in the system. Systems thinking provides a powerful mechanism for people to engage their collective thinking and actions into a process of collective learning.

- 1.8.6 Efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration can be achieved through improving the managing of interdependencies, interrelationships and interactions within a system. The more efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration are between operational people involved in the system, the lesser the need for coordinating on the level of the manager. It is, however, not sufficient to ask people to work more closely together or in cooperation. People need to know how that specific system functions and what interdependencies and interrelationships are required for successful interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. They need a specific systems learning framework or structure within which they can self-construct an operational domain, allowing their own space for action, while at the same time creating cohesion between autonomous units in working toward an agreed purpose of the larger system.
- 1.8.7 The operational performance of an organisation will improve if the managing of interdependencies and interrelationships improves. Improved interdependencies and interrelationships will result in higher quality interactions which will enhance interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. Through the application of a systems approach this is achievable. Systems thinking can change our ways of thinking, seeing and acting.
- 1.8.8 Through systems thinking a project or team-based Human Resources structure can be constructed which will enhance the ability of the organisation to reconfigure itself in order to pro-actively respond to changes.

1.9 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH STUDY

This project is a description and explanation of the process I have followed in order to improve the operational efficiency within the Human Resources Department. It describes my actions in self-reflective cycles, my observations of the results of those actions, and my theory supported by the literature of the successes with this process.

Part 2 : Inquiry Framework

Chapter 2

In this chapter, I discuss the developing of an inquiry framework to deal with the identified problem. I discuss why I have chosen to utilize action research as my inquiry framework. In addition, I will discuss the overall action research paradigm, the particular methodology and the specific methods used to generate plausible answers and plans to deal with the problem.

Part 3 : The Application of Theories and Plans Designed to Achieve Intended Causes and the Results

Chapter 3

I review and discuss some of the key themes which relate to the situation within the Human Resources Department and, more specifically, I critically review my own leadership within my department. I am particularly concerned with establishing collaborative ways of working whilst the underlying management structure is one of hierarchical relationships which support reductionist thinking. I begin to rethink my leadership of my staff and realise that there is a contradiction in my thinking, in that my thoughts differ from theirs in terms of "thinking" collaborative work-processes. I also claim that it is not just enough to instruct or ask people to work in teams. The reason being that if people are used to working in hierarchical structures, a reductionist thinking mental construct is being framed. People need, therefore, to be exposed through a co-orientation process to the systemic nature of organisations in order to "build" horizontal (relational) structures.

Chapter 4

I discuss how we have given direction to our work-processes through creating systemic work-units on the basis of systems thinking and specifically the *Viable Systems Model of Stafford Beer (VSM)*. The purpose was to reconstruct what we are doing, how we are doing it and why we are doing it. A cybernetic systems approach has been followed as this methodology focuses on how systems control their actions and how they communicate with other systems and with their own components. The claim I make is that a systemic technical framework in itself is not adequate to bring about interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. Specific attention has to be given to cognitive restructuring processes through addressing the mindset of addiction.

Chapter 5

I discuss the process followed to change the mindset of addiction - changing the reductionist mindset to a collaborative thinking mindset. Interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration requires a cognitive mental construct to transform collaborative thinking into collaborative action. The best method to achieve this is through a project basis. It is not possible to change relationships without working on them. Change in relations is not possible without learning, assimilation and adaptation. Change has to go beyond structures into the behaviours and relationships of people.

Part 4 : Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter 6

I discuss the contribution of this action research learning process, the action research methodology, to the client system being my Human Resources Department and the recommendations made.

Part 5 : Critical Reflection on my handling of this project

Chapter 7

I reflect on my handling of the project, its relevance and validity and what I have learnt from it.

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PART 2 :

**DEVELOPING AN INQUIRY FRAMEWORK TO
DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM : RESEARCH
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF DATA
COLLECTION**

INQUIRY FRAMEWORK : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In chapter 1 I discussed the problem situation, the problem to be solved and generated guiding questions for deciding which theory will be best suited to assist in solving the problem. I have also provided reasons why systems thinking as a theory has been chosen together with an evaluation of the results.

The question now is "What methodology will provide me with the necessary inquiry framework to efficiently go about solving the problem?" The nature of the problem to be solved is not only technical but also systemic. The team, therefore, needs a process or methodology which is systemic in nature; which is intended to improve the situation being addressed and which, at the same time, will develop the skills and insights of the individuals involved.

Due to the fact that action research provides a systemic inquiry framework, it has been utilised as the inquiry framework for this research project. In this chapter I discuss the development of action research, the action research paradigm, the particular methodology and the specific methods used to collect and interpret data as well as what plausible answers and plans are able to deal with the emerging problem.

2.1 GUIDING QUESTIONS

In deciding what the best research paradigm and methodology should be used, I asked myself the following question : Which methodology will assist in :

- obtaining a true reality of the situation being created;
- minimizing my bias and premature interpretations;
- getting "inside the situation", adopting the role of leader as well as one which "lets the situation speak for itself";
- obtaining a true reflection of the key theme and the interpretation that emerges from the situation;
- not imposing learning on the situation, but allowing it to evolve into a collaborative model;
- creating a situation for the evolution of a democratic process of "co-learning" ;

- generating insights about the ability of my staff to create their own personal images or theories of “their” and “our” situation and what they would like to see changed;
- encouraging the stimulation of new mental models and fresh approaches to creative solution thinking which is directly related to current operating procedures and problems;
- fostering collaboration and teamwork;
- encouraging the necessary involvement and commitment from my staff to change the situation;
- strongly encouraging systemic reflection of our practice;
- ensuring the necessary responsiveness; and
- obtaining an understanding of both our proposed theories and the theories currently in use?

Further to this I ask myself the following implicit questions to guide my research approach:

- How can I understand what is happening in this project and what is my real concern in practice and how am I going to improve the situation?
- How can I validate my interpretation as I proceed?
- How can I present my insights in a constructive manner, what evidence will let me make a true judgement about the situation?
- How can I realize my mandate in a way that is ethical and respects the competing interests shaping the situation?
- What can I and others learn from this project in which I am engaged?
- What are the insights and ideas that can be generalised from this situation and applied to others?
- How do I produce a living education and theory “epistemology of practice”?

My inquiry has involved consideration of my practice as Manager of the Human Resources function. It firstly involves a critical reflection of my practice for the last four months, specifically relating to how I manage the interrelationships and functional interdependencies within the Human Resources Department and how I can improve this practice. As indicated above I have to use a research method that provides me with the necessary underlying principles to address my concerns. As a research paradigm and methodology, action research is appropriate to support my aims.

2.2 DEFINITIONS, MODELS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF ACTION RESEARCH

2.2.1 *The Action Research Paradigm*

"Action research means different things to different people, not only in terms of how it is done, but even in terms of why it is done" (*Peters and Robinson, 1984*). Opinion varies in terms of whether you need an external research expert to help you do it or whether action research is best done as a self-managed collegiate enquiry - whether the research aspect of it needs to be done rigorously enough for the findings to be capable of being replicated elsewhere or whether the research is just local in intent - whether the approach is simply organisational problem solving or whether its real goal is the empowerment of the individuals involved so that they can be more self-determining in future.

Although more detailed definitions are available (*see Burning, 1994*), it can basically be said that action research is essentially a self-managed process of collaborative and rigorous enquiry, action and reflection which, through a series of cycles of these activities, are intended to improve the situation being addressed and, at the same time, develop the skills and insights of the individuals doing it.

Three approaches to this concept are implicit in the following definitions:

- 1) " a systematic enquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical and undertaken by participants in enquiry" (*McCutcheon and Jung, 1990 : 148 as cited in Masters 1995 : 1*);
- 2) " a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out (*Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1990 : 5*);
- 3) "action research aims to contribute to both the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutual acceptable ethical framework" (*Rappopast, 1970 : as cited in McKennan 1991 :4*).

It is closely linked to action learning, which is also concerned with the taking of actions to improve the situation and learning from that experience at the same time. At the heart of both processes is the learning from experience model popularized by *Kolb (1984:21)*.

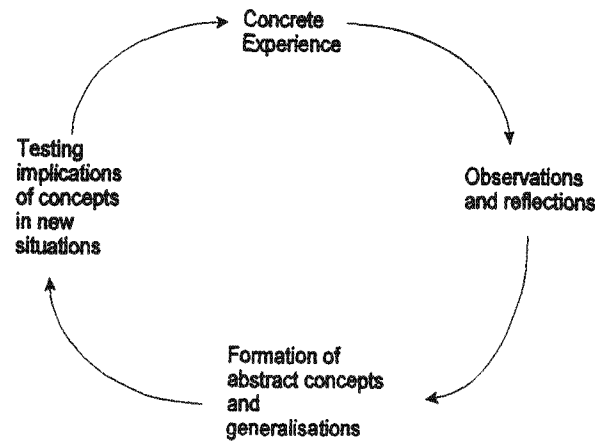


FIGURE 1 : KOLB'S EXPERIENCE LEARNING MODEL

Action research is also closely linked with "action science".

All three approaches build on the pragmatic tradition of finding ways of linking theory and practice so that knowledge can be action based and derived from practice in the real world as opposed to being generated in scientific laboratories or through abstract survey methods.

The scientific method, as well as action research, starts by making a rational decision about the type of problem that it will pursue. The scientific method makes the value choice to pursue generalisable knowledge rather than situation specific knowledge; it pursues external validity at the expense, if necessary, of internal validity. Action research makes the value choice of pursuing situation specific knowledge rather than generalisable knowledge, thus it will trade external validity for internal validity, if necessary.

The scientific method promotes primarily theory and collected knowledge of the appropriate field of study while action research usually promotes theory and practice.

The aim of action research is to :

- pursue action and research outcomes at the same time;
- be responsive and flexible - it responds to the emerging needs of the situation;
- increase rigour in the collection and interpretation of data;
- work collaboratively with others who are part of the situation being researched and acted upon. The primary reason for this is the belief that effective social actions cannot be taken unilaterally, i.e., by an individual researcher / activist;
- be cyclic; similar steps tend to recur in a similar sequence;
- be qualitative; it deals more with the language than with numbers; and

- be reflective - critical reflection upon the process and outcomes are important parts of each cycle.

The success of action research depends on whether the person involved understands the situation. Within a social context individuals construct and modify their perceptions of the situation. Human Beings are, therefore, seen as not responding in a determined way to their environment, but as initiators of their own actions. The principal concern is the understanding of the subjective view - the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he/she find him/herself.

Theory develops from specific situations and such theories should make sense to those involved and offer insights and understanding. Humans play an active role in constructing, making and enacting their realities. Reality depends upon the observer.

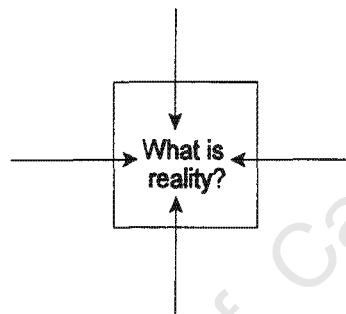


FIGURE 2 : BOX OF UNDERSTANDING

Reality is just a perception. Various factors determine the way in which reality is perceived. As the twentieth century has progressed, increasing attention has been devoted to understanding how language, images and ideas shape social reality and our understanding of the world at large. The social-constructionist's view is that whatever the characteristics of the "objective" world, they are always known and experienced subjectively. The reality of what we observe is determined by the act of observation. As somebody once stated, only **God** can be objective.

Different views shape how we understand organisations and management (*Burrell and Morgan, 1979*). People tend to get trapped by their perspectives and assumptions. They build their own mental models based on their perception of what they believe to be the reality. People's views of reality are influenced by conscious and unconscious social constructions associated with language, history, class, culture and gender experience. Social construction of reality becomes difficult to break, with people becoming no more than passive "voices" reflecting and "speaking" their social contexts (*Morgan, 1993*).

Whether they know it or not, humans have the potential to transform themselves and their world through individual and collective enactments that can "realize" new images, ideas and world views - thus creating new mental models. Mental models are underpinned by the idea that human awareness and knowledge have an unfolding, transformative potential and that the images and ideas that people hold of themselves and their world has a fundamental impact on how their realities unfold. I believe that people do make and shape their world and have the ability to do so repeatedly. In general mental models are images, assumptions and stories which we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions and every aspect of the world. Human Beings cannot navigate through the complex environments of their world without cognitive "mental maps" and representations of reality that people use to understand specific phenomena. Mental models are a primal means through which we forge our relationships with the world.

Action research is a powerful methodology to make our mental models explicit and to share and discuss them with other people involved in our decisions. Due to the fact that mental models are stable and tend to resist change, the purpose of action research is to change and this depends upon the agreement and commitment of those affected by it. Through the process of critical reflection where the researcher and those involved in the situation critique what has happened, individual mental models are also changed to one shared mental model. The increased understanding which emerges from the critical reflection assists in building the "ideal" mental model for that specific situation. The research component of action research mostly takes the form of understanding on the part of those involved. Action research is a methodology which has the dual aim of action and research. **Action** - to bring about change and **Research** - to increase understanding on the part of those involved. Understanding is directly linked to increased learning.

"Action research conducted in the true spirit, will change situations and organisations" (*Drinon 1991:93 as cited in Wortley 1996:5*). As a paradigm, it demands the practitioner's discipline and knowledge. Often people in positions of authority fail to grasp that others "may interpret the situation and the significance of the problems in ways very different from their own" (*Stringer 1993:43*). This ignorance can unfortunately inhibit change.

Action research provides the necessary paradigm for me as the researcher, to ensure that my research is not just a scientific exercise, but that real individual and organisational change can occur. It is further, if correctly implemented, a powerful paradigm for professional development. The systematic reflective nature of this paradigm and methodology provides insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations which we accept as valid accounts of our educational development (*Whitehead 1988:1*). "I claim that a living educational theory will be produced from such accounts" (*op.cit:1*). "When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependant on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case" (*Schon 1983 as cited in Whitehead 1988:2*).

Action research as a paradigm provides a theoretical perspective. Because our judgements are based largely on our tacit theories, on values and beliefs that are culturally determined and not explicitly articulated, the act of creating a narrative permits us to distance ourselves from our judgments and affords an opportunity to make the basis of our work open for inspection. This leads to creating our own theories in practice. Action research is the paradigm that results in building views on theory in practice. In the next paragraph I will discuss participatory action research as this is the methodology which I have chosen for this project.

2.2.2 Participatory Action Research

As previously mentioned, the methodology I intend to use must support my aim of promoting teamwork, collaboration, participation, critical reflection on my present practice and the empowerment and emancipation of the research group seeking to improve the social situation. I decided to use this methodology research as my aim because it is a method of research where creating a positive social change is the predominant driving force. This rises out of social and educational research and exists today as one of the few research methods which embraces principles of participation and reflection, empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation.

This research can be defined as "a collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social practices" (*Kemmis and McTaggart : 5*). Through participative action research our interpretations of the problems we face are channeled into an integrated framework of planning, acting observation and reflection also called the four moments of action research as depicted in **Figure 3**.

These research moments exist independently and follow each other in a spiral cycle (*Kemmis and McTaggart, 1990 : 5*). The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined actions of each individual group member. This process is indicated in **Figure 3**.

"Reflection in participatory action research is that moment where the researcher and participants examine and construct, then evaluate and reconstruct their concerns." (*Grindlay, 1986:28*). Reflection includes the pre-emptive discussion of participants where they identify a shared concern or problem. Planning is constructive and arises during the discussions of the participants. Action happens when the plan is put into place and the hope for improvement in the social situation occurs. The action will be deliberate and strategic. It is here that participative action research differs from other research methods in that action or change is happening in reality and not as an experiment "just to see if it works".

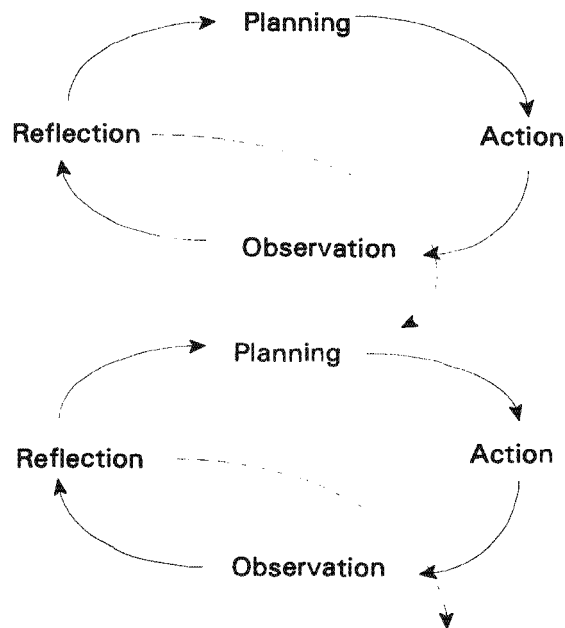


FIGURE 3 : THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

Observation in participatory action research is that part of the research where the changes as outlined in the plan are observed for their effect and the context of the situation (*Kemmes and McTaggart : 13*). Observation and action often occur simultaneously. The principles of participation, collaboration, empowerment, knowledge and social change set participative action research apart from traditional research methods as well as other models of action research. A requirement of action research is that it must have an explicit methodological framework. This model of *Kemmes and McTaggart* depicted in **Figure 3** provides such a framework.

This integrated framework improves our ability to become skilled in the art of “seeing”, in the art of “understanding”, in the art of “interpreting” and “reading” the situations we face. Participative research throws the problem of interpretation right back at each and every one of us involved in the situation - on the “knowers” rather than the “known”. It obliges and encourages us to become “our own theorists”, forging our own understandings and interpretations of the situations we face.

It is a powerful methodology of theorising and explaining the nature of the distortion of knowledge. It is a model of theorising an approach to social change that assists the researcher and his co-researchers in mobilising highly relativistic, open-ended, evolving and interpretative frameworks for guiding understanding and actions. The aim is to help the researcher and others involved in the situation to develop ways of seeing, thinking and theorising in order to improve their ability to understand and manage the highly relativistic, paradoxical and changing character of the world with which they have to deal.

The old mechanistic world view on which so many organisations and management theories - and indeed science - have been based, encouraged a search for fixed theories and linear methods and techniques of understanding and practice. It is a

methodology that promotes understanding and practice in a more fluid form. It allows the researcher to remain open to multiple and evolving interpretations of a situation, picking up key cues and signals as he or she goes along, to develop a "story line" that evaluates and integrates the various insights into an overall understanding of the situation.

Participative action research is a reflective practice - it encourages us to become skilled interpreters of the situations which we have to deal with. It encourages us to develop our skills of framing and re-framing so that we can learn to see the same situations in different ways, so that we can remain open and flexible to multiple meanings so that we can generate new insights.

Action research's aim is to assist practitioners in improving their practice through systemic rigorous processes. The dynamic process between theory and practice entails the expansion of both theory and practice. When a person reflects upon theory in the light of practical judgement, the form of knowledge that results is personal or tacit knowledge (*Martens, 1995*). This tacit knowledge can be acquired through the process of reflection. In the *ACTION RESEARCH PLANNER*, action research is described as "providing a way of working which links theory and practice to one whole and argues that it offers an approach to school improvement through action and reflection which are appropriate to the real, complex and often confusing circumstances and constraints of the modern school" (*Kemmis and McTaggart 1982 : 5-6*). The interaction of theory and practical judgement through the process of reflection, with input from critical intent leads to critical theories (*Grindlay, 1982:359*).

"To do action research one must plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systemically and more rigorously than one usually does in everyday life; and to use the relationships between these moments in the process as a source of both improvement and knowledge" (*Kemmis and McTaggart 1988:10*). Action research also provides the opportunity to develop a new form of work place-based educational knowledge. It is suggested that practitioners hold certain values and at the same time experience their denial in their work place. He argues that through practitioners' exploration of questions such as "How can I improve my practice?", living educational theory is being created as we describe and explain our educational development (*Whitehead 1988*). A systemic reflection on such a process provides insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations which we would accept as valid accounts of our educational development. "When someone reflects - in action he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case" (*Schon 1983*). Due to the fact that action research has a critical reflectory nature, it is a powerful methodology to improve one's epistemology in practice.

Participative action research is squarely positioned within the tradition of qualitative research methodology. One reason for this is that action research addresses the whole system's issues which are invariably multi-variate and so are best approached within a holistic, rather than a reductionist framework. A second reason is that researchers seek to influence the phenomena being studied during the action research process itself, in the belief that the true nature of a social system becomes most evident when you seek to make changes to it. It is an interventionist rather than an experimental approach. A third reason why qualitative methods are used in action

research is that the research design itself is not fully detailed in advance and then rigorously and inflexibly implemented. Rather the research design is emergent, meaning it emerges progressively, influenced by the events that take place during the research project and by the progressive analysis that is made.

2.3 HOW CAN WE MOVE FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE UNIVERSAL? - A QUESTION OF GENERALISING

Often, you can't generalise from action research, meaning that you can only make claims about the people or situations actually being studied. This is often seen to be one of the main disadvantages of action research. Experimental research, done well, often allows for generalisation. An experimental claim can often be taken to be universally applicable. This issue can also be looked at in a different way. Generalisability might be regarded as having global relevance - the ability to apply a finding from one experimental setting into other settings. Action research pursues local relevance, if necessary, at the expense of global relevance. Experimental research often achieves global relevance, but at the cost of being difficult to apply practically to local situations.

Whitehead argues that generalisability can be enhanced through applying the theory in diverse settings. The more studies in diverse settings that give similar findings, the more the theory allows for generalisability than a single study typically does. Similar actions may produce similar outcomes in different situations; this implies generalisability.

The relevance of the findings can also be evaluated through literature which is indirectly relevant. "To the extent that the values underpinning the practices, the dialogues of question and answer and the systemic form of action/reflection cycles, are shared assumptions within a research community - then we are constructing an educational theory with some potential for generalisability" (*Whitehead, 1988*). The "general" in a living theory still refers to "all", but instead of being represented in a linguistic concept, "all" refers to the shared form of life between the individual constituency and the theory.

"Action-based approaches to research seek to generalise insights about patterns of one situation that may have relevance for understanding a similar pattern elsewhere" (*Morgan 1993*). I also support *Morgan's* view that action research is to render a rich texture of a situation in a way that will allow the reader to gain some experience in the situation and understand the patterns and processes involved so that he or she may use them as key insights or key learnings that may have relevance in understanding similar situations in other contexts. The generalisation of generalisable insights that capture the pattern of events and problems and generalisable strategies and tactics through which similar problems or situations can be tackled elsewhere can be created through action research.

The generalisability rests in the ability of the researcher to achieve insights that he or she can use in understanding the same group or groups in other settings. This is called the "Ah Ha" experience - the feeling that "Ah Ha!" this is an interesting insight that can help me with my problems or dealings with Group X (*Morgan op.cit*"305). The generalisability rests in the resonance and relevance of the case as constructed by the reader; there is no direct claim or assertion as in the more conventional social science research of any direct empirical correspondence. The generalisation of strategies or tactics that may contribute to the development of problem-solving techniques or learning processes is an objective of most action learning initiatives. It reflects the action researchers' aim of creating opportunities for people to experience and see the relevance of a learning process that they can incorporate into their normal activities on an ongoing basis. Through action research the generalisability does not rest in the story itself, as it usually does in scientific papers offering a series of generalisable facts of relationships, but rather in the resonance the story creates in the reader's mind. It seeks to convey a different kind of knowledge and insight than those sought after in more traditional approaches to organisational research and should, therefore, not be judged in conventional terms (*Morgan op.cit*:306).

In the *REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER*, the "crisis of confidence in professional knowledge" is discussed (*Schon 1983:3*). *Schon* argues that there is a rift between research and practice and that professional knowledge is mismatched to the changing character of the situation of practice, i.e., the complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflicts which are increasingly seen as central to the world of professional practice (*op.cit*:14). Professional knowledge is viewed as the application of scientific theory and technique in instrumental problems of practice (*op.cit*:30). Professional practice, therefore, consists of instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and practice (*op.cit*:21). *Schon* further mentions that there is a gap between professional knowledge and the demands of the real world practice (*op.cit*:45) and that there is, therefore, a need for an epistemology of practice (*op.cit*:49). The real value of action research is that it is a methodology which can be used for the realisation of such an epistemology of practice. Through reflection and observation of my practice in a specific context, I build a theory of practice which is value-driven as depicted in **Figure 4**.

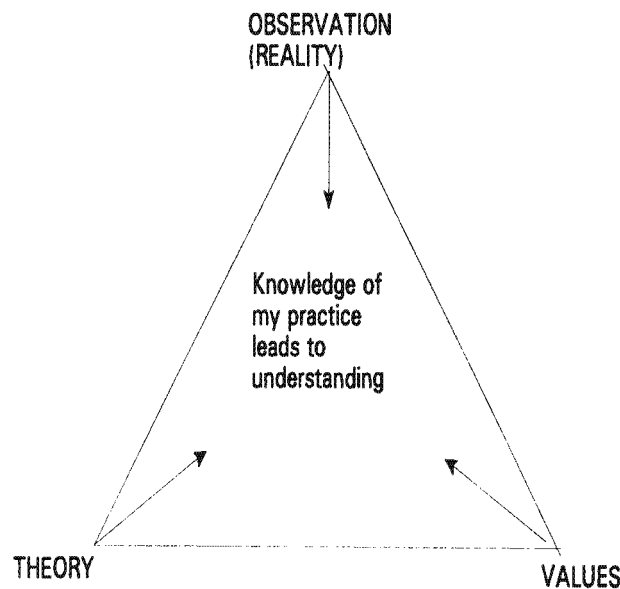


FIGURE 4 : REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION

2.4 RIGOUR IN ACTION RESEARCH : A QUESTION OF VALIDITY

Questions of validity are fundamentally important in all research which is concerned with the generation and testing of theory. The issue of validity is also linked to the status and generalisability of the knowledge produced and specifically to the issue concerning the validity of ongoing interpretation and conclusions that can be drawn from the action research project. This is a concern for any researcher who wishes to get beyond the limits of his or her subjective experience and test the validity of emerging themes, interpretations, understandings and overall reading of the situation with reference to the wider setting (*Morgan 1993*). Action-based methodologies require that insights, interpretations and conclusions emerging from research be checked in as many ways as possible. This emphasises the importance of seeking, confirmations, refutations and reformulations throughout the course of the project.

In action research the knowledge generated is always context based, which makes the claim to any universal or broad-based validity problematic. "In such projects the true nature of the situation can only be verified through the perceptions and interpretations of people whose perspectives are always shaped and bound by the particular horizon of interests and biases that they bring to the interpretation" (*Morgan 1993 : 307*). In the context of ethnographic and action research, validity has an interesting meaning. In conventional science, validity carries the notion of truth and reliability. From an ethnographic and action research standpoint, such "truth and reliability" are relative (*Morgan 1993 : 308*). "It is important that the action researcher strives to get beyond the limits of his or her own personal understanding of a situation to ensure that there is some wider validation of what is being seen, thought or done. This, therefore, emphasises the importance of the methods used in action research for the collection

and interpretation of data" (*Morgan op.cit*).

The method and process to be used must be of such a nature that they allow for testing and verifying interpretations as one goes along. Through discussions and by seeking reactions to written descriptions, the research participants and core researchers will finally draw their conclusions. This can be problematic in an action research project due to the role one is playing. To understand the situation, the interventionist has to learn to "peel the situation" and move to progressively deeper levels of understanding. The question is "how can this be achieved?"

"Rigour, flexibility and commitment are essential qualities of action research" (*Dick 1999*). This relationship is indicated in **Figure 5**.

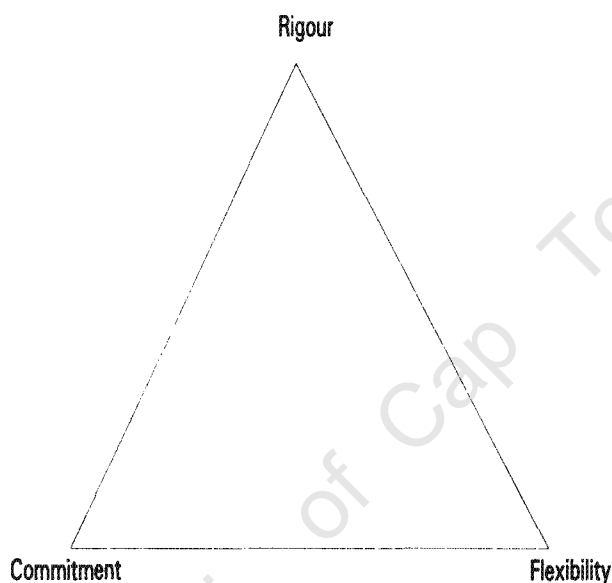


FIGURE 5 : RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RIGOUR, COMMITMENT AND FLEXIBILITY

Rigour is directly linked to validity. It has to be done in such a way that it is not sacrificing the commitment to change, or the responsiveness and flexibility on which change depends. Rigour, flexibility and commitment are proportional to each other.

"The issue for action researchers is not how they can ensure that their findings are valid, but how they can ensure that their procedures are rigorous" (*Winten 1989*) Adequate rigour can be achieved through :

2.4.1 Critical Reflection

The cyclical nature of action research is one of the important defining features of action research. Critical reflection serves two purposes. It draws understanding from the experience of the action. It then allows the development of plans to turn understanding into action. Each cycle gives the researcher the chance to challenge the data and interpretations of the previous cycle; the more cycles, the more the challenge and more assurance that the results are valid. Within each cycle you can:

Intend (or : reflect before action)

This allows you to decide what you want the next step to achieve. In addition, it allows you to think about what actions might achieve the desired outcome and why.

Act (and : reflect during action)

This allows you to check that you are doing what you intended. It also provides the opportunity to monitor whether or not you are achieving your intended outcomes and to change your actions in the light of your experience.

Review (or : reflect after action)

You now recollect your actions and those of other people. You can reflect critically on the assumptions that underpinned your intentions. It is useful to review:

- the goals you are pursuing;
- the data you collected;
- your interpretations;
- the methodology and methods you are using, and how well they are working; and
- the people who are involved as participants or informants.

You then move into the second half of the reflection session, by deciding (planning) for the next cycle.

2.4.2 Triangulation or Dialectic (Links to Interactive strategies for data collection)

This implies the use of multiple sources of data and interpretation within each cycle. The notion of dialectic is to ensure the necessary focus. There are several ways of doing this, for example :

- different methods or forms of data collection, commonly called triangulation, such as convergent interviews, analysis of documents and observation;
- different methods of data interpretation : - collect interpretations as part of a focus group or theories such as participatory observation or soft systems

methodology;

- different informants involved in the research situation;
- different questions which pursue the same information from the same informant; and
- different researchers - one of the advantages of involving participants as co-researchers is that they provide a different perspective which can challenge your own. One can also involve colleagues as researchers, interpreting information and then comparing notes.

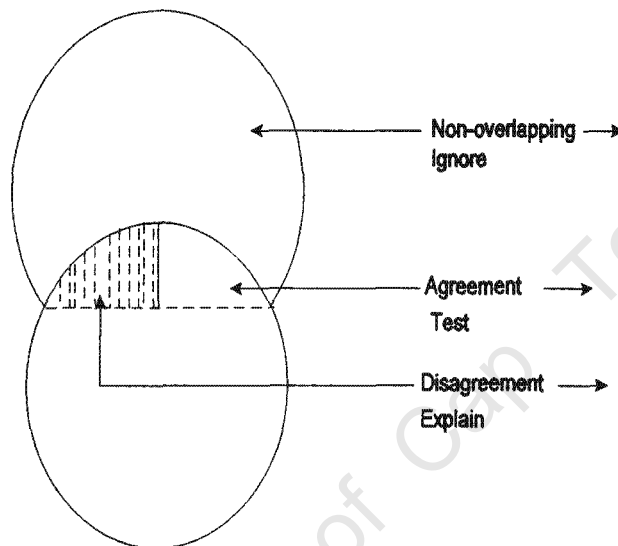


FIGURE 6 : AGREEMENTS AND DISAGREEMENTS

Figure 6 indicates that only overlapping data is considered. If the participants are in agreement, this agreement has to be tested in later cycles. On the other hand, if there is disagreement, later cycles attempt to explain the disagreement.

For example, if two participants should agree that teamwork in the Human Resources Department is good, the researcher must look for exceptions in later interviews. If the two participants should disagree that teamwork within the Department is good, the researcher must seek explanations for this disagreement in later interviews.

Each cycle begins by refining the questions and the methodology in the light of the previous cycle.

2.4.3 Using Literature (non-interactive strategy)

Literature is another valuable source of information. The choice of methodological literature can help you choose a robust approach. It is important to read literature which is **clearly** relevant to the context of your study. It is crucial to stay focused.

Through these processes the researcher is required to clarify his/her own interpretive frameworks, to analyze these critically and to present his/her claim to knowledge. Researchers need to know what to use as the unit of appraisal and the standards of judgement in order to test a claim to educational knowledge. It is suggested that the unit of appraisal is the individual's claim to know his or her own educational development (*Whitehead 1988 : 5 op.cit:5*). "In grounding my epistemology in personal knowledge I am conscious that I have taken a decision to understand the world from my own point of view, as a person claiming originality and exercising his personal judgement responsibly with universal intent. This commitment determines the nature of the unit of appraisal in my claim to knowledge. This unit is the individual's claim to know his or her own educational development" (*Whitehead 1985*). The criteria used to assess a research process and the researchers claim to educational knowledge therefore includes, for example, considering whether :

- the inquiry was carried out in a systemic way;
- the values used to distinguish the claim to knowledge as educational knowledge is clearly shown and justified;
- the claim contains evidence of a critical accommodation of propositional contributions from the traditional disciplines of education;
- the assertions made in the claim are clearly justified and/or
- there is evidence of enquiry and the critical approach to an educational problem.

Those operating within action research approaches, therefore, have to present different criteria for critically examining research. A researcher must present his or her account for critical scrutiny. This approach to educational theory is being developed in a community of educational researchers who are committed to forming and sustaining a dialogue communally and who are willing to offer, for public criticism, records of their practice which are integrated within their claim to know this practice (*Lomax 1986 in Whitehead 1998:5*). "A form of question and answer can also show how to incorporate insights in the conceptual term of the traditional forms of knowledge whilst, at the same time, acknowledging the existence of ourselves as living contradictions as we refer to the records of our practice" (*Whitehead op.cit:5*).

This revelation is crucial for the reconstruction of educational theory. "In order for the action researcher to stay "in tune" or "in touch" with the evolving nature of the situation, the extent to which images, interpretations and actions "vibrate" and create some kind of "echo" or response, either negative or positive, in the situation one is dealing with - which he called resonance - the researcher's attitude has to be open and evolving. He or she has to be ready to change an interpretation as new information or insights emerge, validating or reformulating the unfolding "story" as the process goes along, using whatever information or opportunities present themselves" (*Morgan 1993:308*). This is why I like to use metaphors such as those of "mirroring", "reading" or having a conversation with a situation (*op.cit:309*). Through this process one can develop "valid" insights. The whole process of interpretation and validation can prove to be an ethical mine field and require creativity on the part of the interventionist researcher

(*op.cit:311*). The only way that an action researcher can be protected against these problems is by building an ethical stance into virtually everything he or she does (*op.cit:311*).

2.5 ENSURING THE NECESSARY RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP

My aim is to do research which is useful in both theory and practice. My rationale for my enquiry was to improve working conditions for my staff through communication and understanding with regards to their practice and mine. The practice specifically relates to "how can I improve the managing of the interrelationships and functional interdependencies within my Human Resources Department?" I was concerned about the quality of the process and I wanted to explore, understand and improve my own practice in my role as Human Resources Manager.

I am aware that I am working within a rapidly changing context, one involving complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflicts. As this project was aimed at being an action research project, I was not faced with the question of which paradigm or methodology to use, but rather to what extent this methodology could assist me in the process of explaining and improving my own understanding and practice as well as all that of all those involved - particularly in improving the managing of the interrelationships and functional interdependencies within the Human Resources Department. The purpose was that my research should be grounded in reflection of my own practice. This brings me to the issue of power relationships within action research.

In clinical action research it is the idea that the source of power for the action, and since the idea often resides with the facilitator, is the facilitator who controls the power of the project (*Masters 1995:7*). Power in practical action research, like organisational and professional action research, involves sharing between groups of equal participants. However, the emphasis is still upon individual power to action (*Wortley 1996:1*). In participatory action research, participants are free from traditional oppressive constraints. Power is located in the group and not with individuals. "The expert is a process moderator, collaborating and sharing equal responsibility with the participants" (*Hughes 1996:2*). "It is often the change in power relationships within the group that causes a shift from one model to another" (*Grindy 1982:363*).

I was faced with the implicit contradiction of how to ensure effective research relationships between myself as the "researcher" and my staff. The issue that I am the manager and that I must provide the answers may have the potential to have a negative impact on the research relationship, specifically because in educational or epistemological research, the emphasis is on "how can I improve my practice?" I realised that I could only ensure the required research relationship if I could succeed in changing the "I" to "we". The specific method I chose of "participant observer" in the situation should label me as an "outsider" and "co-learner". This raises the question of how to "get inside" and adopt the role of a learner. How could I get the situation to speak to itself and understand as far as possible the situation in its own terms? I realised that I would have to generate as much data as possible while exerting as little influence as possible.

My methodology should be a systemic reflection in order to create a clear understanding of the situation. My purpose was not only my own professional development, but also that of my staff. This once again emphasises that I must come into the situation as a "co-learner" rather than as an expert. I have to leave my hypothesis behind and support my judgement so that room is created for new insights to emerge as the situation "speaks". Participative action research is such a methodology which assists in ensuring the necessary "research relationship". Without the necessary sound "research relationship" the researcher becomes isolated and the "co-researchers" in the situation reflect on it as "his" project not "ours". My contribution to my own bodies of tentative knowledge is that if I don't manage to create a "we" situation, it will be difficult for action research to really succeed in bringing about the necessary social change. My intention was not to develop hypotheses about an "observed reality" nor to generate conclusions which could be generalised to other contexts, but to gain insights and understanding concerning my own practice and the practice of my staff.

The *Action Research Framework of Kemmis and McTaggart* as depicted in **Figure 3** has been utilized as a method of generating first insights of how the Human Resources Department operates as a system. Participative action research involves a theory about a relationship between a system's sense of identity and its ability to change it. It builds on the principles that people and organisations tend to get trapped by the mental models they hold of themselves and that genuine change requires an ability to see and challenge these mental models in some way. Action research provides a methodology through which people and groups can see themselves and their situations in a fresh light, creating opportunities for reflection, action and change. This leads to the construct of epistemology in practice. It can, therefore, change people's theories in use. People become more aware of the theories that drive their actions. It encourages double-loop learning as it also transforms the context, i.e., where the norms of the systems themselves are challenged and changed. It can be compared with the old problem of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Superficially one can create the impression of making a lot of changes, but at the base level, nothing of significance may have really changed. That is why I am in favour of research which results in practical relevance rather than only theoretical relevance. Knowledge should develop from practice and so should it directly inform and support the same practice.

Collaboration can only be ensured if the people involved in the situation create the urgency to change their situations. In this situation I realized that in order for me to improve my practice, I also had to improve the practice of my co-researchers. They should identify themselves with this project and take "ownership". Participative action research is such a methodology that provides useful insights through critical reflection on one's own practices. My staff must observe it as "their reality" and not that of the researcher. Learning cannot be imposed on a situation but must evolve in a collaborative model.

Another issue is "how to identify valid key themes and interpretations (to produce an evolving reading of the situation) which can result in real change actions". This issue directly relates to the data collection process. What methods are used to ensure that a rich description of the situation is "pictured." The data has to provide the necessary raw material for developing and evolving the "reading" of what is happening by identifying the key themes and interpretations that can be drawn which have to be

verified or reformulated on a continuous basis as the research process unfolds. I was cautious of my influence in the process in order for my co-researchers to understand the situation in its own terms.

The ultimate aim would be to create understanding and explanations that are entirely "grounded" in the words, concepts, images, ideas and theories of my co-researchers and to mobilize actions generated from within the situation (*Glaser and Straus 1967 as cited in Morgan 1993:302*). This was however problematic due to a number of issues that were beyond my control such as time constraints, the upcoming elections and the fact that I was not sure I could be 100% objective.

2.6 METHODS USED IN PRACTICE

2.6.1 Research Process

The research process is depicted in **ANNEXURE "A"**.

2.6.2 Ethnographic Research

The purpose of ethnographic research is to address issues and problems within the design of cooperative systems. Ethno-methodological accounts of human activity are based upon detailed descriptions of the activity that is the result of spending prolonged periods as a participant observer in the setting where the activity takes place.

It has the advantage of avoiding the problems associated with the artificiality of laboratory-based study and produces accounts that are worded in terms that are readily understood by the participants being studied. It produces detailed accounts of how work is accomplished in practice, rather than how it may be specified or how workers might report their actions in an interview. It has the benefit of bringing into the field of practice a form of improved understanding of the way work is socially organised.

My ethnographic research of the community of social practice within the Human Resources Department is attached as **ANNEXURE "B"**. This study has been completed over a period of four months (March 1999 - June 1999). The following particular fact dominated my ethnographic research.

The operational effectiveness of the Human Resources Department as a system is being negatively influenced due to a perceived lack of cross-functional collaboration amongst the different functional units within the Human Resources Department.

2.6.3 Action Research Framework

The *Action Research Framework* which is depicted in **ANNEXURE “C”** also reflects my critical reflection of the context, situation and practice through the process of ethnographic research.

2.6.4 Methods of Data Collection in the Action Research Cycles

The following methods are used during the three cyclic action research cycles.

Cycle I

Purpose (outcome) of this cycle: To create an awareness of the necessity to work as a team together with a specific focus on interaction and integration.

Actions to achieve the outcome: I purposefully instructed my staff to interact with one another as well as to think about how their actions influenced their colleagues within the Human Resources Department.

Data Collection : Dialectic Approach: Over a period of two weeks I became a participant observer of my staff's actions. I evaluated one variable which was collaboration in terms of our staff establishment. Various mistakes in regards to staff establishment information were made. Further to the above, the following methods were used.

Individual Informants: My staff were requested to give their input on the following questions:

- *What is/should be the common focus of the Human Resources Department?*
- *What should your functional unit's objective be within the defined purpose of the Human Resources Department?*
- *Which other functional units within Human Resources interlink with your functional unit?*

These inputs were also analysed during this process.

Monthly Reports: My staff had to submit reports on a monthly basis with regards to their functional unit's activities. These reports were specifically studied to identify whether cross-functional collaboration had occurred.

Individual Conversations: Individual interviews were held with my staff in order to assess their viewpoint on issues which they perceived to be destructive in achieving their functional objectives.

Conclusion Cycle 1: The following was agreed to :

- There is a low level of understanding amongst my staff as to how

the Human Resources Department functions as a system;

- The functional units still operate as functional silos; and
- It serves no purpose to only request or instruct people to work together or to collaborate with other functional units.

The following disagreement was listed :

- The result of Cycle I showed me that there was a lack of focus on processes. I thought that I was focussing on processes, but in practice I tend to manage my staff according to their functional units. From the above it is clear that my objective of cross-functional collaboration had not been achieved.

Cycle II

Outcomes desired: To improve the level of understanding of my staff with regard to how the Human Resources Department functions as a system.

Actions (Interventions) to Achieve Outcome: We decided to evaluate the functionality of the Human Resources Department on the basis of the systems thinking and specifically according to the *Viable Systems Model of Stafford Beer*.

The Viable Systems Model (VSM) of Stafford Beer is an organisational design model which is based on cybernetic principles. Cybernetics focused on how systems function, with the key concern being control of actions and how systems communicate with other systems or their own components. The intention is that through the use of this model, organisations can be ideally organised to achieve efficient and effective realisation of set goals, whilst maintaining a balanced openness for and ability to adapt to changes in the environment. Structure is not the focus, but recursion is fundamental so that vertical interdependence can be dealt with. Sources of command and control are spread throughout the design of the viable system which enhances self-organisation and localises management of the problem. The model does not dictate or prescribe any particular management style.

The VSM is a generic system framework which incorporates five basic functions necessary for viability, being operations (S1), coordination (S2), control (S3), intelligence (S4); and identity (S5). Every viable system should exhibit each of the five systemic functions which has to operate harmoniously with the others and with its environment via effective communication channels. This model therefore can be used to explain and analyse organisational viability - viability being the capacity to maintain an independent existence in the long term.

With the assistance of an external facilitator we had a workshop on 17 and 18 May 1999 to analyse the functioning of the Human Resources Department on the basis of the VSM. The result of the two-day workshop is attached as **ANNEXURE "D"**.

The team agreed to critically reflect, after a period of one month whether the agreements and disagreements as highlighted above had positively improved.

Question : Did we achieve the desired outcomes? What are our noticeable results to date?

Method of evaluation: The S1-operational unit responsible for the skills and development function was specifically requested to compile a database of our current staff complement in so far as it reflected group representation for the purposes of preparing a plan in terms of the Employment Equity Act. When the job incumbent responsible for the Equity Plan forwarded her information to me, I compared her total staff figure with that of my organisation and work-study functional unit, which was located in the S1-operational unit as responsible for decision-guidance. The difference between the two sets of data was about 390. I went into a critical reflection initiative with all my staff in order to identify the structural causes for this situation. It became clear during the critical reflection phase that limited cross-functional collaboration had occurred.

The following was agreed:

- understanding of new concepts, possibly radical concepts takes time;
- new types of behaviour and attitudes cannot just be decreed. They must be allowed to grow, people on the team must foster them themselves;
- the VSM has improved my staff's understanding of the functioning of the Human Resources Department as a system, but there was "resistance" to interact with other functional units. The reason being that there was no shared commitment to the overall purpose of the Human Resources System. The VSM has however provided a basis for relationship building which fosters open communication, collaboration, team work and a participative approach;
- the desired mental construct has to be cognitively constructed.

Cycle III : Cognitive Restructuring

Outcomes required: To change my staff's mindset of addiction from hierarchical (reductionist) thinking to cross-functional collaboration.

What actions will achieve these outcomes? To supplement systems thinking with a specific project which demands cross-functional collaboration. The following projects were identified.

S1 - Decision Guidance Unit

Project: Correct staff establishment information.

S2 - Skills and Development Unit

Project: To implement a workforce Transition Plan on the basis of the Employment Equity Act.

S3 - Risk Management Unit

Project: To assess risk in terms of Labour Legislation Noncompliance.

Relevant Literature: Throughout this action research process various literature with regards to cross-functional collaboration, teamwork, organisational learning, the learning organisation, change management, transformation management and action research was studied as part of my interpretation process.

This literature is reflected in my references.

2.7

CONCLUSION

The dominant emerging issue resulting from my ethnographic research was :

In order to achieve higher operational efficiency I have to enhance interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration through improving my management of relationships and interactions within the Human Resources Department. In part 3, I explain what theories and plans (interventions) have been implemented and the results thereof.

PART 3 :

**THE APPLICATION OF THEORIES AND PLANS
AND THE RESULTS THEREOF :**

**“THERE IS NOTHING QUITE AS PRACTICAL
AS GOOD THEORY AND NOTHING SO GOOD
FOR THEORY MAKING AS DIRECT
INVOLVEMENT WITH PRACTICE.”**

Source Unknown

UNDERSTANDING THE EMERGING ISSUES : CRITICAL REFLECTION AND APPLICATION OF INTERVENTIONS

It is required from the participants to maintain effective and collaborative work-processes in order to ensure that any system or sub-system is operationally efficient. To achieve this, team members have to, inter alia, synergistically build upon each others work, align individual work with that of the team, effectively communicate and coordinate. This requires direction and support from the leader as well as a well-defined framework in order for the team members to coordinate their actions. Without a systemic framework, it is difficult to achieve effective cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration. In this chapter the key themes which emerged from my ethnographic research are reflected. I also discuss that it is not sufficient to simply ask people to work together as a team. People need a guiding framework for their actions to work synergistically together.

It is becoming more and more important that the management of Human Resources functions calls for effective partnerships amongst Human Resources professionals and operating line managers. This challenge becomes even more demanding as processes and cultures that have to support the building of sustainable and constructive relationships become more complex due to the constant changes in variables such as diversity, government compliance, work place changes and the need for the effective managing of participative work processes and systems.

The Human Resources Department's primary role is to assist and provide support to line managers in providing a contemporary work place and work force based on motivation, creativity, teamwork and professionalism. It is our responsibility to be the leaders in improving the quality of work life of all role players within the organisation. This can only be achieved through effective and collaborative work-processes. Team members have to, *inter alia*, synergistically build upon each others work and align individual work with that of the team through effective communication and coordination in order to ensure effective, collaborative work-processes.

It is, however, imperative that the leader of the team rethinks his / her roles in fundamental ways. To achieve this, the leader has to engage in a process of personal reflection in order to promote better self-understanding, and find fresh ways of thinking, behaving and communicating with those with whom he or she works. This is called "looking in the mirror" (Morgan 1993 : 21). Through critical reflection of my leadership role within my department, I can create a better understanding of my dominant behaviour and the impact it has on the operational effectiveness of the teams. This was done through asking my staff to respond to the following two questions :

- 1) What is your view of my management effectiveness with regards to the Human Resources Department?

- 2) How does your specific function interact with the other functions within the Human Resources Department?

The reason for this reflection is twofold:

- 1) To evaluate the mental model that I perceived to be my leadership effectiveness with the mental model of the different individuals created on the basis of our moment-to-moment interactions;
- 2) To create a mental model of their understanding of how the Human Resources Department as a system, functions and interrelates.

To improve the “design” phase of my action research process, I have to allow for reflection. The reflection phase has to assist in building a shared understanding of two issues, being: “management effectiveness” and “inter-connectivity of functions.”

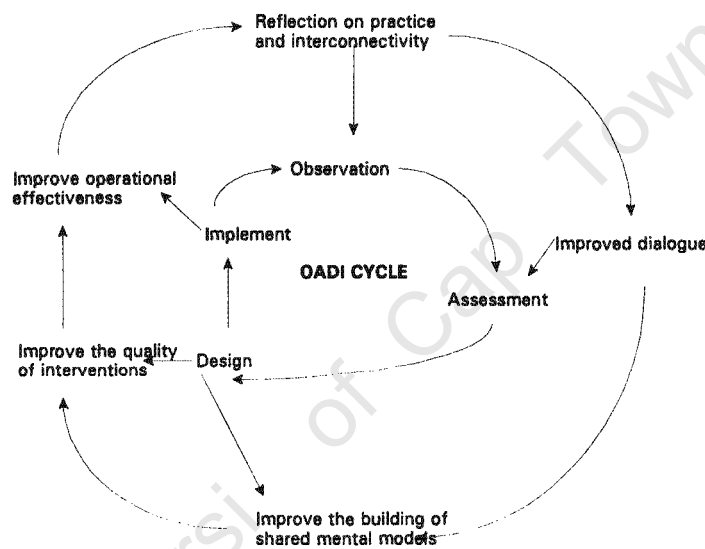


FIGURE 7 : LEARNING AND MANAGEMENT

The learning cycle as depicted in **Figure 7** provides a basis for my staff and me to act and reflect, in order to clarify our thinking and increase our capacity for effective action. A Spanish poet said “ Life is a path that you beat as you walk it” (*Dantonio Macodo*).

From my ethnographic research the following issues emerged as having a severe impact on the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the Human Resources Department.

- 1) Through many managerial practices, I am able to enhance and encourage my staff to work in functional silos’ and this supports reductionist thinking;
- 2) There is a low level of understanding of how the Human Resources Department as a system has to function;

- 3) There is a lack of collaboration across functional units as well as with interpersonal processes which involve staff within natural functional groups;
- 4) There is a very high level of fragmented learning.

This situation is serious as it has all the symptoms of an ill-health system. Reflecting on this situation I experience a feeling of survival anxiety; the anxiety being that if this situation does not change, the Human Resource Department is not going to be competent and effective. This means it is not going to add value to the operational effectiveness of the organisation.

Organisations are complex systems and the first important point to note is that systemic health can only be understood as a combination of the following four factors, each of which must be present to some degree:

- 1) a sense of identity, purpose or mission;
- 2) a capacity on the part of the system to adapt and maintain itself in the face of internal and external changes;
- 3) a capacity to perceive and test reality; and
- 4) some degree of internal integration or alignment of the sub-systems that makes up the total system.

These four conditions in a sense are a prerequisite for learning or can be thought of as a basis for "capacity to learn" (Shein 1999 : 3).

In most complex organisations the operators have learned that the world is systemically interconnected and that it takes cooperation and teamwork to increase effectiveness. It was clear to me that my "production units" are dysfunctional in these respects and that if the Human Resources function wants to become a strategic partner in the organisation we have to increase our internal work-processes and teamwork. As leader of the Human Resources function, I have a mission in that I want to produce and implement effective and efficient Human Resources processes that positively contribute to the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation.

I realised that I was confronted with a change or transformation process. The question was how to create the necessary survival anxiety amongst my staff in order for them to understand why we have to change and also to obtain their commitment to the manner in which the necessary changes needed be brought into our work situation.

My question was : "Will it be enough just to tell my staff what is lacking and request them to work more closely as a team together? Will there be any noticeable results or improvement?" In order to answer these questions I decided to monitor certain variables, namely :

- correctness of the staff establishment information;
- correctness of information of job advertisements;

- the amount of disputes arising from appointments and how they are being solved; and
- correctness of information provided by the employment equity officer in comparison with that of the staff establishment.

The above “products” all require a degree of cross-functional as well as interpersonal collaboration. I specifically decided not to give any direction or direct support in the first improvement phase. The quantitative performance indicators I decided to monitor were :

- customer service (expressed in the form of how many complaints I received from line management);
- quality (expressed as the number of mistakes made by the team);
- operational focus (expressed by the extent of how much cross-functional collaboration and interpersonal collaboration has taken place) and
- work processes (expressed by any improvement perceived in work-processes).

After two weeks observation I could not really observe any significant improvement in the quality of the “products” delivered. The following reasons substantiate my observation :

- There was still a significant number of differences between the total posts approved, posts filled, vacancies existing and vacant posts being approved for filling;
- The numbers of posts, qualifications as well as the relevant details regarding the skills and competencies of posts being advertised were not correct in some cases;
- Disputes resulted from inadequate handling of appointments by the staff because there was no input from the labour relations unit;
- There was still a significant gap between the information provided by the employment equity officer and the organisation and work-study unit.

Reflecting on the situation as I observe it, the following negative cycle emerges:

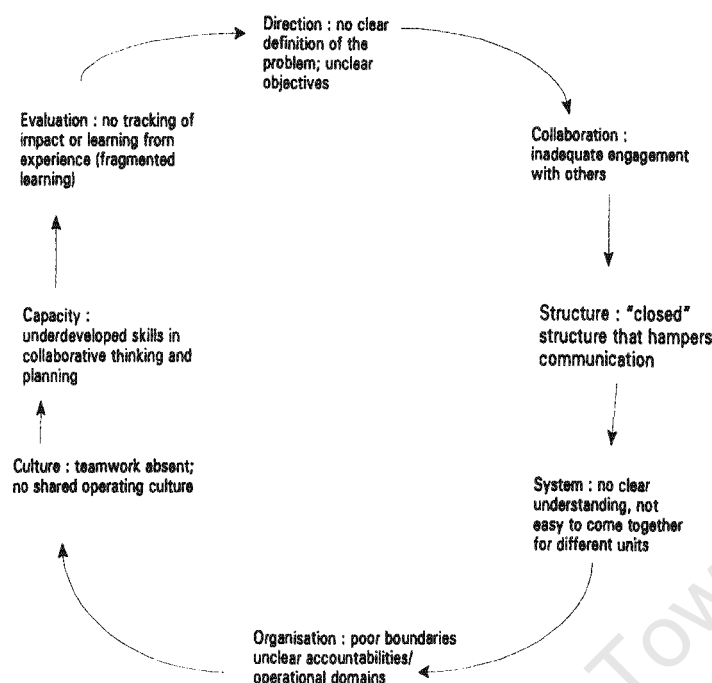


FIGURE 8 : NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT CYCLE

A leader or manager cannot expect his people to improve their performance without creating a shared understanding of how the system they are working in has to function as a system in order to be operationally effective and efficient. In the first instance people need clear direction of the purpose or mission of the system and also how the different sub-units of a system should interconnect and cooperate to achieve the purpose of the system.

The systems view looks at the world in terms of relationships and integration. As the emerging issues from my ethnographic research indicate a lack of collaboration, the team decided to use a systems approach to improve the situation. "A system is a network of interdependent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system. The secret is cooperation between components towards the aim of the organisation" (W. Edward Deming).

The operator culture is based on human interaction and, to be operationally effective, high levels of communication, trust and teamwork are essential. Within social systems such as a Human Resources Department, the world is primarily viewed through human interactions. Relationship is everything when you see the world as a social system. As a social system, the operators have to become highly sensitive to the exact degree to which the Human Resources production process is a system of interdependent functions all of which must work together in order to be efficient and effective. This relationship which is required for operational effectiveness and efficiency also has to be conceptualised in terms of a system of interdependent and interrelated functions. The cyclic research process followed in this

study has been slightly adapted as depicted in **Figure 9** hereunder.

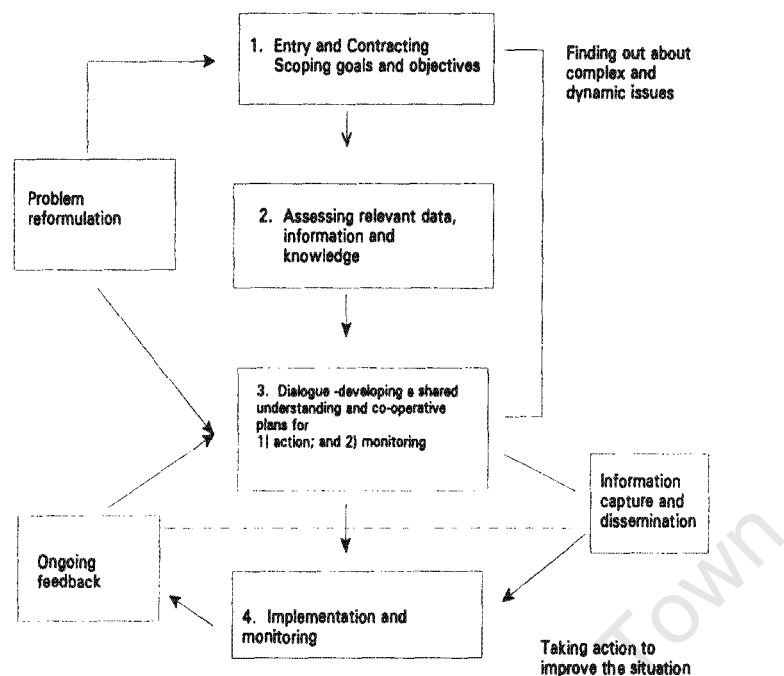


FIGURE 9 : PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This participatory research framework is similar to that of *Handy's Wheel of Learning* as depicted in **Figure 10**.

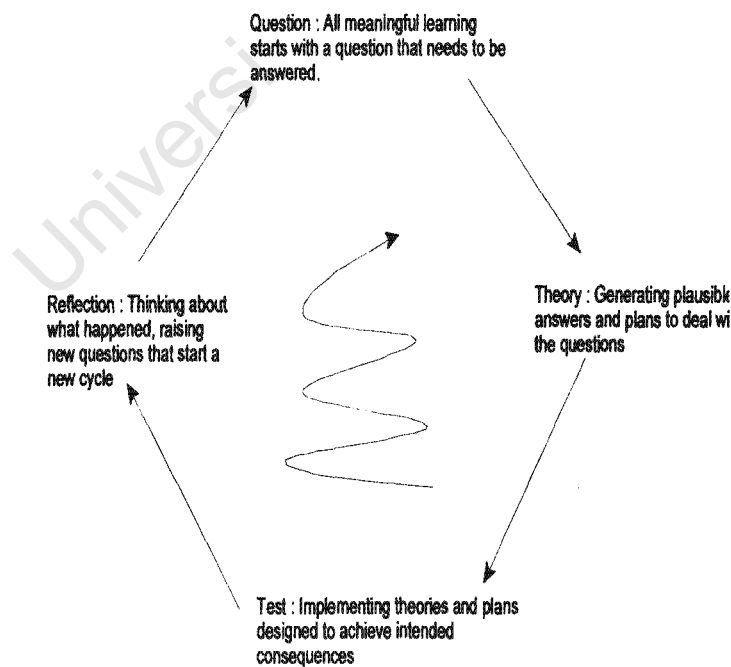


FIGURE 10 : HANDY'S WHEEL OF LEARNING

Conclusion

It is not just enough to ask people to work together particularly when the current managerial practice enhances reductionist thinking through managing functional silos'. The fundamental objective is to create the right behavioural context that stimulates people to take initiative, collaborate and develop the confidence and commitment to continually renew their activities and those of the organisation. To facilitate interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration, people need to create a structural framework. The most predictable question is, "What kind of structure do you need to create it?' In the next chapter, I explain how the relationships and interactions within the Human Resources Department have been reconstructed.

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DESIGNING A SYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING INTER-RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

In chapter 3 I discussed that people naturally prefer to work within their own operational domain. I also had to make the statement that people prefer to work individually. "Each of us by our language and our actions (both tacit and explicit) continually creates the reality we function within. Autonomy is the attitude that my actions are my own choices and the organisation, of which I am a part, is in many ways my own creation" (Block 1987 as cited in Dixon 1998 : 2). Organisation members who have functioned within a bureaucratic framework for many years often become so resigned to the reality they experience that they are not capable of seeing that an organisation can change; that just as all organisational forms are a product of the human mind, so they can be altered by the human mind.

As argued in chapter 3, people functioning in hierarchical structures tend to become trapped in reductionist thinking. I also explained that it is not enough to only ask people to work in teams. To improve interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration people need a sound understanding of how the system they belong to functions, specifically with regards to the interconnectivity and interdependencies of its different parts.

In this chapter I explain how my Human Resources Department has been reconfigured through systems thinking and specific cybernetic principles based on the Viable Systems Model of Stafford Beer. The reason for using a combination of systems thinking and cybernetic principles is that systems thinking focuses on the structure of a system while a cybernetic theory focuses more on the functioning of a system. Through improving the interrelationships and interconnectivity of functions, my management of the relationships and interactions has improved, but the necessary interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration which is required for self control and coordination of processes has not really materialised due to the embedded functional mindset of my staff.

Through my ethnographic research it has become evident that the operational effectiveness of the Human Resources Department, i.e., the managing of the staff relationships and interaction, needs urgent attention. I also realised that I had to create the awareness amongst my staff that they needed to change in order to function as co-participants. My staff had to realise that they had the right to co-create and co-transform the organisational realities within the Human Resources Department. It was also required of them to co-create the organisation of the Human Resources Department in a form that was more satisfying and that would enhance cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration. I realised that in order to succeed I would have to fulfill a role of facilitator and co-participant rather than one of manager. I wanted the staff to experience that they were not players in someone else's field but able to take responsibility to acknowledge that their very silence was a form of collusion in which they gave tacit agreement, and in so doing were helping to create the organisation as it existed.

Through critical reflection with them on their inputs they agreed that the status quo could not be maintained. There was an agreement of dissatisfaction with the current situation.

Effective relationships and interaction require that lateral communication be enhanced. This is about taking on an active role in understanding that what others know would be helpful to one's own unit and also about "newly empowered" participants taking an active role in identifying the information that one's own unit has that others could use and then creating joint meetings, databases and information exchanges that meet these needs. It also means individuals assuming the responsibility for sharing knowledge on co-management of the Human Resources Department. They have to actively learn from experience every day to develop as responsible, participating members of the department. This involves the responsibility to continually:

- 1) reflect and deliberate on what has happened as a result of individual or team action and,
- 2) reflect with others on the actions of the whole system in order to learn how to make it function better.

Too many management theories are based on mechanical models of the organisation, which fail to notice that success is best achieved by treating the organisation as a complex ecology, whose workings cannot be fully predicted. Effective collaboration is essential to enhance internal work performance and to develop new products and services. To be a successful work team, the following requirements are essential :-

- effective collaboration across functional borders;
- good relationships;
- new ways of thinking; and
- learning

Cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration is difficult to achieve due to the fact that members bring their own functional cultures into the teams, and, as a consequence, have difficulty communicating with each other, reaching consensus and implementing decisions in an effective manner.

The functions of a Human Resources Department are highly interdependent and interrelated. As a social system the effectiveness of the Human Resources Department is dependent on:-

- social groups within this function and the interaction within and among them;
- the perception people hold of the forces that shape their social interaction : either tangible forces such as rules, roles and reward systems, or intangible forces such as power, pride and attention to detail;
- the purpose and goals of the system and whether they are understood and shared by everyone.

The people involved in the system have to be sensitised to the fact that the Human Resources process is a system of interdependent functions all of which work together in order to become effective and efficient. In order to deliver quality products or services, integrated and intergroup actions, particularly in those areas that cut across functions are important. To improve the managing of relationships and interaction a system perspective is required. A system perspective will improve the understanding of the interdependence of functions and actions. It will also assist in viewing problems and solutions in terms of systemic relationships among processes.

Effective collaboration depends on people, the way they learn their jobs, work and collaborate with their colleagues. This involves learning, rethinking of work processes and embracing a new work ethic that transcends the narrow specialisation that the workers find themselves in. Cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration needs processes and relationships necessary to support horizontal flows of information. In this way, improvement and leverage of individual knowledge can be obtained so that it is embedded in a collective process of shared learning. This must be supported by an inclusive framework to guide actions and formalise relationships.

Collaboration entails teamwork. The concept of "teamwork" is highly touted today in organisational circles, yet the evidence for effective teamwork is at best minimal. "The problem lies in the cultural assumption that the society revolves around the individual and individual rights are so deeply embedded that when teamwork is advocated we pay lip service but basically do not change our individualistic assumption" (*Shein 1999 : 4*). *Shein* suggests that in order to bring change in this area we need to redefine teamwork as the coordination of individual activities for pragmatic ends, not the subordination of the individual to the group (*Shein 1999 : 41*). If we define teamwork as individual subordination we arouse defences. The redefinition of teamwork must also allow one to redefine individualism in a way that it preserves its privacy; not to substitute groupism for individualism. This process of redefinition in effect enlarges the concept of individualism to include the ability and obligation to work with others when the task demands it. In other words, relying on a team to win is consistent with individualism.

In changing the embedded "individual culture" to a "team culture," I need to create an opportunity for myself and my staff to inquire and reflect on both my own and their mental models, without invoking defensiveness. We need to evaluate our mental models of the Human Resources system - developing and improving theories of how the system functions, including how the individuals themselves work in this system.

The creativity analysis has indicated that we need both a "purposeful relational reconfiguration" and a change in organisational behaviour to be able to execute this reconfiguration and operate under new conditions. It is, therefore, important that as part of cycle two of the research project, the method chosen clearly gives direction to me and support to my staff in terms of "relationship structuring" and the interaction needed for operational efficiency.

We need to re-frame our relationship and interactions as we have become trapped into single frame thinking, which limits our ability to respond to organisational problems in novel and creative ways. Re-framing our actions involves the assumption that, by getting people to use multiple frames, their repertoire of interpretation and possible future action will be expanded in any situation. As such, re-framing "encourages us to look at ourselves and our situations with fresh eyes" and to mobilise and use our capabilities for imaginative, motivative thought

and action. It encourages us to recognise that we can become skilled “readers” or “interpreters” of the situations in which we find ourselves and produce novel understandings that will allow fresh action to emerge” (*Morgan 1993 : 265*).

Re-framing represents a voluntarist approach for understanding social action - that is, one in which it is up to individuals to change their circumstances and to achieve this through interpretation of organisational situations. “Underpinning this voluntarist approach is an idealist stance on the connection between thought and action” (*Palmer and Dunford 1996 : 2*). Idealism consists of three specific claims. First, that social behaviour is caused by the ideas held by social action. Second, that people are able to change conditions in which they are not satisfied by changing their ideas as to why they are and what they are doing. Third, that people are willing to listen to rational analysis of their actions and the context in which they are given, and to act on these analyses (*Fay 1987 : 24*). “If people want to change their world they have to start with themselves” (*Morgan 1993 : 275*). *Morgan* arrives at this conclusion from his assessment of social constructionism which, he argues, is confronted by two choices. The first is to accept that individuals have the ability to enact different world views; the second is because “the deep” structure of power relations lends the world a resilient logic of its own, then one needs to change power relations before one can effect social construction. (*Morgan 1993 : 274*).

Re-framing, in the context of this paper, refers to the clarification of processes through which reinterpretation, analysis and subsequent action can undo sedimented thought processes and practices, and the limits to this. The purpose is to identify a desired future state, thus describing a new role, function or structure that my department needs to adapt in order to improve its operational effectiveness and efficiency.

Organisations are constituted by people's moment-to-moment interactions in their operational domains. It is through these interactions that relationships, and in a given time and space, the organisational structures supporting people's actions are formed (*Espejo 1994 : 199*). These moment-to-moment interactions are languaged by the participants. Languaging takes place as people “bump into” each other and make tacit and explicit distinctions about these bumps, that is, they language them into existence in recurrent interactions. Due to this “languaging” which is a constitutive process, organisations do not have an interdependent existence from the organisation created and recreated by the participants. **Figure 11** depicts these actions in organisations as cited in *Espejo 1994 : 201*.

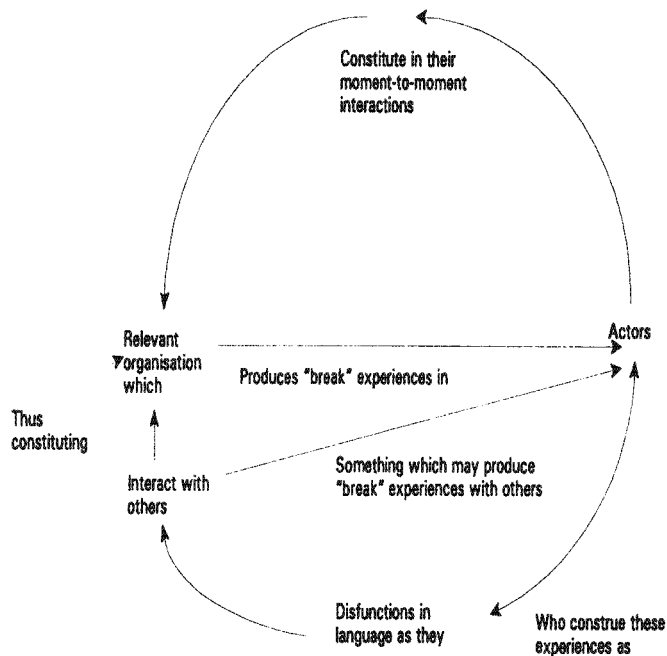


FIGURE 11 : ACTIONS IN ORGANISATION

As our interactions are languaged we develop shared meaning of these interactions which creates the relevant organisation in our minds based on these interactions. A system is first of all a way of looking at the world. It is a mental construct of a whole, for which it is possible to establish a set of interrelated parts that make up the perceived whole. As observers, we bring forth systems as we make distinctions about our experiences in the operational domain. Everything known about the world is known by an observer. The system, its identity, parts and relationships cannot be anything else but a construction or distinction by an observer, and different observers in different contexts and with different purposes may make different distinctions. In this sense, defining a system is view point dependent (*Espejo 1999 : 202*). A system is a construction, and a well-grounded construction may help to coordinate our actions. Systems can be powerful, they define people's theory-in-use, their tacit views, and support their ideas, grounded through conversational processes, that support our coordination of actions.

If the system is not well defined it can seriously hamper its operational effectiveness. "Coordination of actions is an outcome of grounding epistemology in ontology, that is, grounding distinctions in a community of people for whom language becomes a means of coordinating their coordination of actions (*Espejo 1994 : 203*). Epistemology refers to knowledge, ideas, views about the world and ontology, the reality we share with others. It is in the coordination of our actions that we construe human interaction systems or human activity systems. "A human interaction system is the name we give to the set of "bumpings" when we may need to study its identity and structure (*Espejo 1994 : 204*).

It is through their interactions that participants negotiate and renegotiate the distinctions they make in their operational domains, creating and recreating a shared reality - the organisation or system. Operational effectiveness is being negatively influenced if these "bumpings" are not constructive. Further to this, the "bumpings" effectiveness can be improved through a well-defined network of relationships which construe the specific system. The particular

resources, human and others, constituting these relationships at a particular time and in a particular context, define the structure of the organisation. It should thus be apparent that the structure of an organisation is defined by the actual resources and interactions constituting the organisation, not by the parts and lines of authority formally defined by, for example, an organisational chart. The structure will, therefore, to large a degree, influence interpersonal interactions. Any structure needs a well-defined purpose for the alignment of personal and organisational purposes.

The quality of relationships and interactions is influenced by the distinctions we make about our moment-to-moment interactions within our operational domain - the domain of our autonomy - and the distinctions we make about others' operational domains. This observation model is crucial for effective communication. To improve the operational effectiveness of the Human Resources Department as a system, it is important that the participants within the system critically reflect on the system in which they operate specifically in regards to:-

- how the operational domains relate to each other - relationships;
- what the individual operational domains are;
- the interactive processes constituting the "system" - interactions;
- how the systems operate - emphasis on power associated with rule-governed systems that affects participants actions and interpretations.

To critically reflect on the above issues, a complementarist framework is required. The *Viable Systems Model of Stafford Beer* had been utilized as the complementarist framework. The VSM provides a useful systemic framework for thinking about the workings of any system. It is a useful tool for thinking in different ways about organisational structures and to understand the working of a system, specifically, with regard to crosscutting issues. "Understanding the organisation as a system gives primary value to the relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts" (*Wheatly 1993 as cited in Thompson, Baughan and Motwani 1998 : 2*). One of the primary objectives was to demonstrate how individuals have to interact in order to achieve higher levels of performance through teams. The results of the critical reflection process are given in **ANNEXURE "D"**. What has basically emerged is the "three human resources processes" depicted in **Figure 12** as S1-operational teams. These three human resource processes are namely - skills and competencies development, risk management and decision guidance.

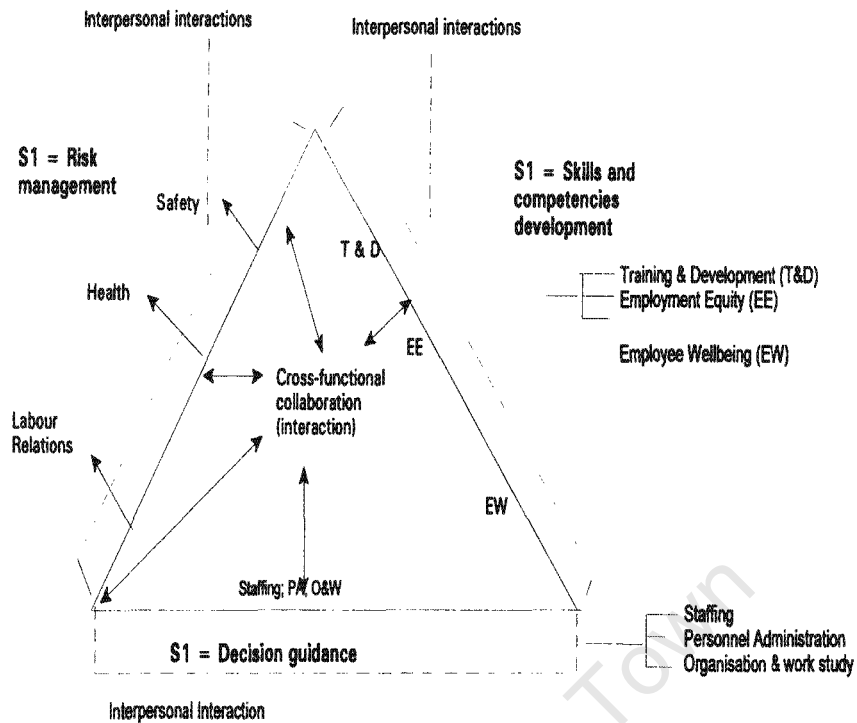
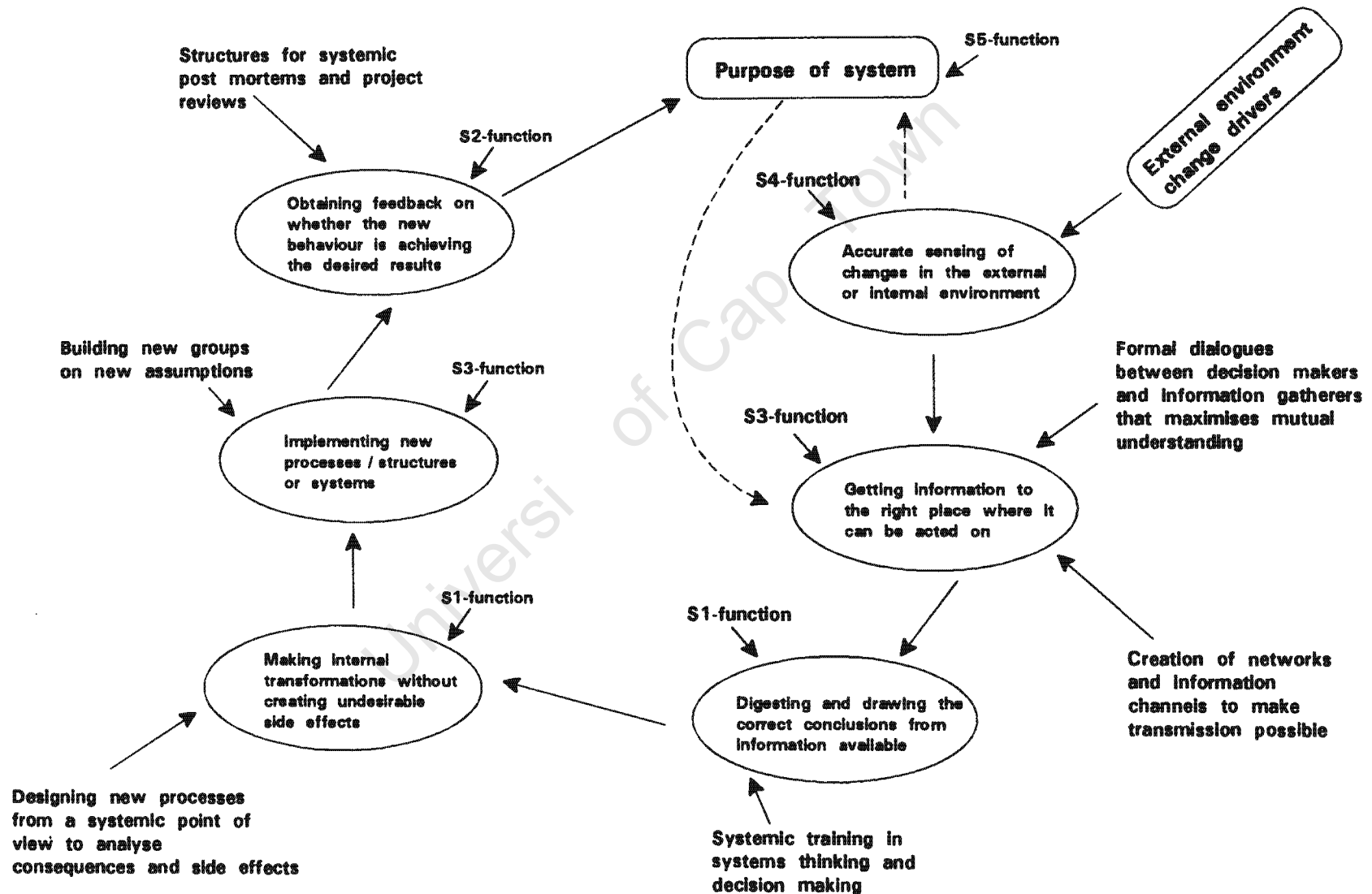


FIGURE 12 : THE HUMAN RESOURCES RELATIONAL STRUCTURE

As depicted in **Figure 13** the functional structure of the department has not been changed. In essence what happened is that a “horizontal structure” has been designed to complement the vertical structure.

**FIGURE 14 : CREATING A DYNAMIC PROCESS AND STRUCTURE
FOR LEARNING TO PLAN AND PLANNING TO LEARN**

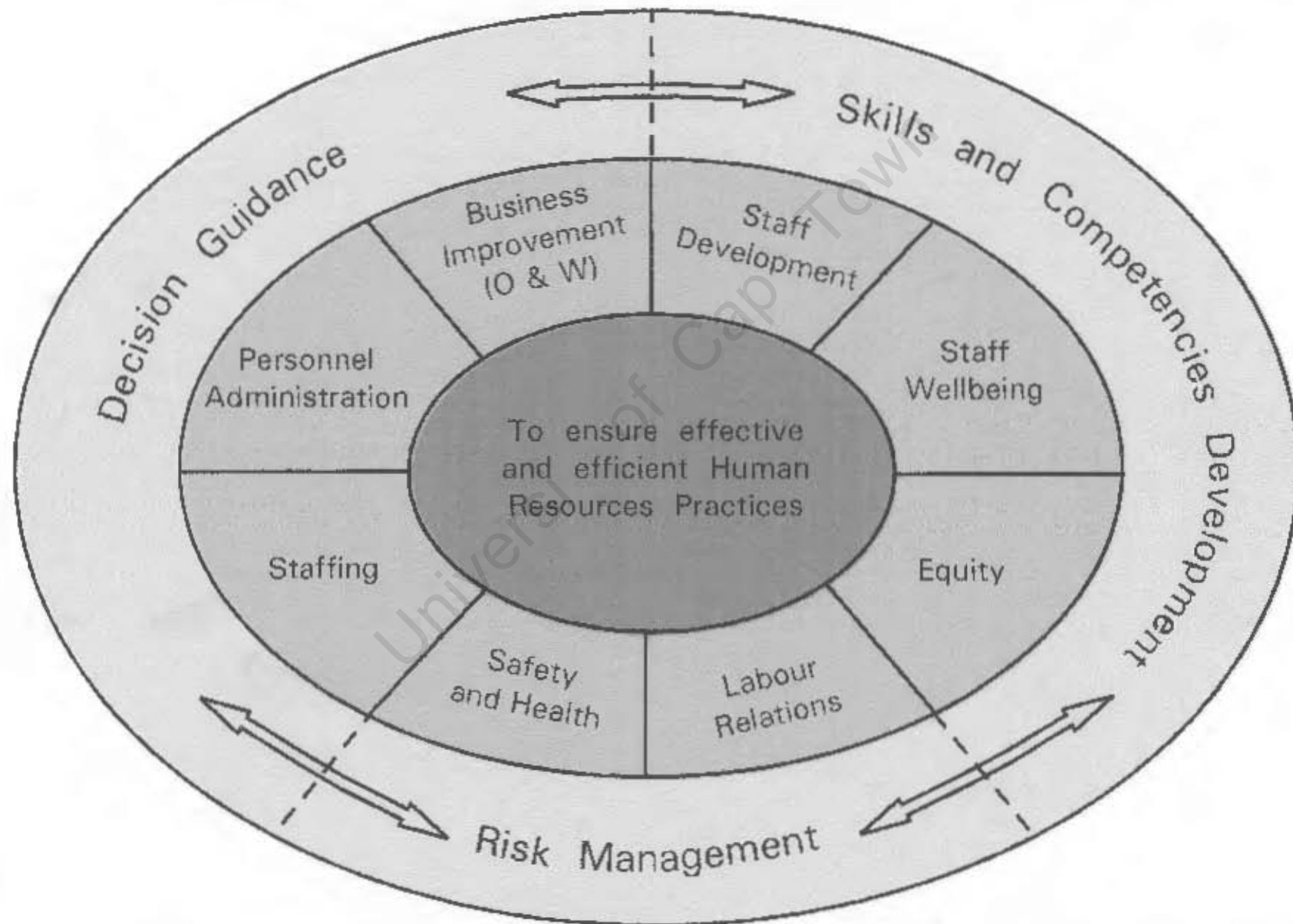


The model depicted in **Figure 12 and 13** is an integrated model that embraces a systems theory and makes that transition into a practical application. The model focuses on the following:-

- structured relationships
- cross-functional collaboration
- interpersonal collaboration
- individualism (autonomy)
- systemic development

Through this model there is a shared understanding of the complexity within Human Resources and an understanding that the S1-operational teams are systemically interconnected. It is recognised that it will take cooperation and effective teamwork to increase operational efficiency. The model serves as a mechanism for creating a dynamic process and structure for learning. Effective collaboration requires processes and relationships to ensure or to support horizontal flows of information in order to link and leverage individual knowledge and to embed it in a process of shared learning. An information flow process is depicted in **Figure 14**.

FIGURE 13: A System Perspective for Managing the Relationships and Interaction within THE HR - DEPARTMENT



The promotion of cross-unit and interpersonal collaboration requires a set of relationships based more on interdependence than dependence or independence. This requires a specific structural configuration - a network of integrated interdependence which is not a threat for the professional specialist's operational independence. One has to be very careful not to follow a mechanistic approach as it can be counter productive or be a threat to developing a legitimate and enduring sense of interdependence. A systemic approach ensures that one does not focus on the structural mechanisms but on the activities which define a cross-unit and interpersonal collaboration. In essence it promotes systemic development as it makes integration and collaboration self-enforcing by requiring each group to achieve its own goals. The Human Resources Department can only succeed in improving the quality of their "products" if they accept the principle of interdependence.

Through the VSM framework it was possible for the team and me to reflect back on the interrelationships and interactions of the Human Resources Department. The functions as structured have provided a basis to improve the management of the interrelationships and interactions within the department. At this stage the Human Resources VSM framework has provided a sound balance between individualism and groupism. We were able to observe that a sound basis was created for effective partnering relationship building. The team interaction facet of the model is to improve relationships, in particular relationships that evoke a mental model to be framed into collaborative partnerships. They create these improved relationships and the connectedness that have enabled us to improve our performance.

Another important aspect which was addressed during this reconceptualisation phase was the aspect of empowerment. There was now a general understanding that empowerment does not mean total freedom. It is the ability to make choices within boundaries (*Thompson et.al 1998 : 1*). The "boundaries" of the teams have been created. Within the ranges set by those boundaries, team members can determine what to do and how to do it.

To a large extent what has also happened is that the team has become the hierarchy. Within the Human Resources Department our "outputs" require team efforts to be effective. The bottom line is that teams are more effective than individuals in complex structures (*Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph 1999 : 12*). A team is two or more people who must work together in order to accomplish a common purpose and are they held responsible for the results.

The question is : To what extent has the operational effectiveness of the following identified Human Resources "products" increased as a result of implementing and interacting? These "products" are :

- correctness of staff establishment information
- correctness of information contained in job advertisements
- correctness of employment equity information

Results

The staff establishment which is the responsibility of the S1-decision guidance team has improved significantly. This team is now in a position to add value to the operational efficiency of the line management. The main reason for this is that the functions are all

interconnected and do not need to collaborate with the other two S1-operational teams. This is also the situation with the correctness of information contained in the job advertisements.

With regard to the handling of disputes - which requires collaboration between the S1-decision guidance team and the S1-risk management team - there was still a high level of uncertainty regarding the what, the how and the why of the need for collaboration. One specific example which resulted in a dispute was a decision taken by the National Bargaining Council and our Local Bargaining Council with regard to the appointment of so-called "package workers". There was an agreement that Local Government would not appoint staff who had resigned and received packages. The employment officer and the specific line manager had appointed a person and the unions contended that this person was a "package worker" and, therefore, we were in breach of our agreement. A critical analysis of the situation revealed that there had been no interaction between the S1-decision guidance team and the S1-risk management team in regards to the situation. The S1-decision guidance team was also fully aware of my instruction that before any person who had resigned from any local authority be appointed, the S1-risk management team - in this instance specifically the labour relations unit - and I had to be consulted. The labour relations unit further did not convey the complications (risk potential) to the S1-decision guidance team should we be in breach of this specific agreement.

In the end I was involved in a two-day strike at our Cleansing branch. In this case there were also clear boundaries for the role players to interact and make their own decisions. I also became aware during this process that the S1-risk management team did not really understand what was required from them in terms of minimising the risk from the Human Resources viewpoint. The Safety and Health Officer, for example, was claiming that his function should be with the S1-skills and development team as he has to interact constantly with them in terms of safety training. The conclusion was that within the S1-risk management team there was still a high level of uncertainty and not a shared understanding of how the risk management sub-system has to operate within the Human Resources System.

In regards to the correctness of the employment equity information which is the responsibility of the S1-skills and development operational team, there was still a large discrepancy between the staff establishment figures of the S1-decision guidance team with that of the S1-skills and development operational team. According to our staff establishment as at 30/06/99 we had 1495 employees while the employment equity figures reflected a figure of 1089, a discrepancy of 396.

My intervention in this specific situation was to convene a meeting with the S1-decision guidance team and the S1-skills and competency development team to discuss this situation.

The following emerged from the meeting :

- there was no interpersonal collaboration within the S1-skills and competencies development sub-system;
- there was no cross-functional collaboration with the S1-decision support unit.

An important point to be mentioned is that within the S1-skills and competencies development team I also experienced some 'degree of resistance' to this transformation process, specifically from the Staff Well-being and Training and Development Officers.

During our discussion I also noticed the following within the S1-skills and competency development team :

- there was some anxiety about how the team members would fit in;
- what demands would be placed on them in terms of supporting individual team members;
- how was their “autonomy” going to be affected;
- some of the team members were still thinking in terms of “I” rather than “we”

Critical reflection with all of the members of the S1-operational teams resulted in the following:

- that the design of the S1-operational teams (the technical aspect of the systems intervention) would provide the necessary mechanism for teamwork, specifically for coordination of the interrelationships and interactions - thus providing the necessary direction;
- that the human interaction and emancipatory aspect of the S1-operational teams requires further attention, as it was clear that some staff members are concerned about their individual autonomy as well as the dominant thinking still being hierarchical. Therefore, changing the central mindset to think in terms of cross-functional collaboration and specifically in terms of processes needs further attention.

Reflecting back on my Negative Reinforcement Cycle (**Figure 8**) I can now reveal that certain aspects of this cycle have changed from negative to positive but there are other aspects that are still being negatively influenced due to the hierarchical thinking and power relations (emancipatory) aspects.

Conclusion

The systemic structural model as developed by the team has improved the management of interrelationships and interactions within the Human Resources Department. It, however, has not really promoted or ensured the necessary interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration which is required for decreasing the need for coordination on the level of the manager as well as for higher operational efficiency.

My conclusion therefore is that a well designed technical structure is not sufficient to bring about an efficient level of interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. Peoples mindset of addiction which can be called the “mental structure”, also has to be purposefully “reconstructed”.

To proceed with my endeavour to improve the operational efficiency of the Human Resources Department through enhancing my management of the relationships and interactions among the three S1-operational teams, I have to give specific attention to the current thinking within the Human Resources Department. This relates to managing the softer aspect of the team - the way people think and communicate. A technical framework needs to be supplemented with two other aspects, namely, changing the people's mindset of addiction as well as looking at the deeper power relations amongst the people operating within that system.

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COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING : TRANSFORMING THINKING INTO ACTION

Managing relationships and interactions requires a behavioural context that supports cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration. During a transformation process the thoughts and ways people communicate with regards to work-related processes, have to be purposefully addressed. New types of behaviour and attitudes cannot just be decreed. They must be allowed to grow. This requires extra attention on the part of the leader of the team who has to give the necessary support and also has to create purposeful opportunities for his team to think and act across their "autonomy" models. If the leader does not change the thinking patterns of his team, the behaviour required for cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration will not follow.

*An integral part of changing the mindset of addiction is the learning process within the organisation. Through the learning process, not only the work itself is being addressed, but also the fundamental assumptions that shape the person's behaviour involved in the system. In this chapter, the aspects of thinking and learning are addressed as sustainable transformation which can only be achieved if the people involved in the system have a real understanding of the reason and the result of team relationships, and also how the teams' effectiveness is being influenced as a result of the quality of their interactions. "An understanding of an organisation as a system gives primary value to the relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts. In systems, all components are related and influence each other" (Wheatly as cited in Thompson, Baughn and Motwani 1998 : 2). The thinking and learning in this action research report have been addressed on a project basis which specifically focuses on three interrelated types of learning processes, these being operational learning, systems learning and transformative learning. The Human Resources Viable Systems Model depicted in **Figures 12 and 13** is a systemic team learning model which has become a "mental model" through this process.*

Through the years we have built up a methodology of reductionist thinking. The reductionist thinking approach promotes the blinkered principle that organisations consist of discrete functional segments ($A+B=C$). This thinking is very powerful and persuasive and it will take an extraordinary effort to be changed. This relates directly to the organisational learning process within the organisation. For change to be effective it is critical to address the mindset as an addiction. This implies that if we want to change something we have to deal with the addiction of how we currently think. We have to discover inside ourselves the will and commitment to do something about the mindset of addiction.

The reason for addressing the thinking of people is that unless people start to think differently, specifically in regards to why it is necessary to change a specific situation, and be empowered to change the situation themselves, they tend to fall back into their own comfort zones of thinking. Changing peoples thinking in itself is a systemic learning process. It means complementing and supplementing them with synthesis or systems thinking. It is not such a clean thing - ... "just throw out all the traditional tools, my past life and switch to new formulas". It means learning something in addition, ... the "and" not the "or". "People start seeing and dealing with interdependencies and deeper causes of problems only as they develop the skills of systems thinking (Senge 1999 : 9). Sustaining

any profound change process requires a fundamental shift of thinking" (*Senge 1999 : 10*).

To a certain extent, systems thinking requires from the participants involved in a system to think in terms of "flows". This requires a complete rearrangement of your mental furniture (*Womack & Jones 1996 : 21*). We are all born into a mental world of "functions" and "departments", with a common sense conviction that activities ought to be grouped by type so they can perform more efficiently and managed more easily. Systems thinking requires a rethink of the activities in terms of value-added services to the customer. This is also one of the major causes for the failure of the re-engineering movement as well as for the matrix of organisation designers. Individuals are still focussing on value-creating processes and, therefore, are still dealing with disconnected and aggregated processes.

Thinking in terms of collaboration is vital for cross-functional integration. The Human Resources Department can only be operationally efficient if the principal of interdependence is properly managed. This requires a mindset of multi-dimensionality. This multi-dimensionality of tasks requires the development of individual perspectives and skills in a way that builds a matrix relationship structure in the minds of the professional. Matrix relationships build links and without a continuous and thoughtful multi-dimensional perspective, cross-functional collaboration will not become a community of practice, but rather a hierarchical coordinated activity.

"Cross-functional collaboration is either propelled or constrained by the capacity of the organisations employees to recognise and embrace change, and thrives only in organisations where the narrow perspective and parochial behaviours of those who live in highly bureaucratic organisations are broken. To break this reductionist thinking, a process is required and systems thinking is a fundamental process for achieving this. We have to first become aware of what our default mindset is, what the automatic settings in our mindsets are before we can think about changing them" (*Goshal and Bartlett 1997 : 124*). "Once we know what our automatic responses are to a situation, we can change them if we want to. The challenge is to identify what it would take automatically and without thinking about it, to think and respond in a new more desirable way. We have to practice the new behaviour or thought pattern a lot, and that takes both commitment and discipline" (*Adams and Davis 1998 : 4*).

"If we continue to believe as we have always believed, we will continue to act as we always have acted, and that if we continue to act as we have always acted, we will continue to get what we have gotten."

(*Author Marilyn Fergusson*)

"The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice, that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change, until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds."

(*Scottish psychiatrist Ronald Laing*)

"Even without knowing the statistics, most of us know firsthand that change programs fail. This failure to sustain significant change recurs again and again despite substantial resources committed to the change effort, the talented and committed people "driving the change". The source for this failure lies in our most basic ways of thinking. If these do not change any new input will end up producing the same fundamentally unproductive types of actions." (*Peter Senge in Dance of Change 1999 : 6*).

You cannot change peoples' thinking just by saying to them "you have to change your thinking". Sustaining any profound process requires a fundamental shift in thinking. The question is how do you get people to work better together, improve their relationships and community building? How do I create a constant awareness for the importance of this inter-connectivity?

Systems thinking is a method to change peoples' individual minds into a process of collective thinking. There is a need for a process of structured dialogue and enquiry for creating this required collective thinking mindset. To promote the creation of this collective mindset, the people involved in the transformation have to critically reflect on the aspect of relationships and their interaction within the relationship framework. This is referred to as the "relational blindness" - the ability to see oneself in relation to others (*Oshry as cited in Senge 1999 : 141*). This "relational blindness" is a product of hierarchical structures. People will only start changing their behaviour if they have a good understanding of the interacting relationships.

Systems Thinking vs Living Systems Perspective

The Living Systems perspective assumes that human groups, processes and activities are self-organising. There aren't any designs or engineers to control the flow of information. Information courses rapidly through the organisation in its own natural patterns. If the right people meet in diverse, frequent interactions, a beneficial re-framing will emerge on its own. I do not agree with this perspective. People first need to understand the what, the why and the how of the system before they will become self-organised. Specifically in hierarchical structures, people tend to work in isolation from one another and resist any effort to work in a horizontal process. People need to re-frame their workings, meaning that they have to critically reflect on the effectivity of their workings and interrelationships within hierarchical structures. The hierarchical structure promotes a system of isolated actions which results in a higher need for the manager to coordinate and inhibits natural collective learning. A systems perspective promotes the interdependence of organisational units and problems and solutions are being approached in terms of systemic relationships among processes.

A culture is a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be that is shared by a set of people and determines their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and, to some degree, their behaviour. A systems perspective is also vital if the operating culture of the organisation has to change. "The operational culture is based on human interaction and to get work done efficiently requires high levels of communication, trust and teamwork. The more complex operations, the higher the need for interdependencies and teamwork" (*Shein 1999 : 1*). Human Resources is also a "production unit" and Human Resources professionals must be sensitive to the degree to which the Human Resources production process is a system of interdependent functions all of which must work together in order to be effective and efficient. There are significant dynamic interconnections.

The hierarchical structure creates a functional orientated isolated culture and it has to be transformed through a fundamental change in thinking. Systems thinking is a mechanism to transform people who are "schooled" in reductionist thinking to the collaborative thinking required for successful transformation. The challenge is not only to transform processes but to transform behaviour. This requires that thinking and actions should be connected. The capacities of the people to reflect, conceptualise, collectively inquire and act in a more coordinated way has to be developed.

Cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration needs a sound well, developed framework to be effective. "As powerful as such cross-unit communication arrangements can be, most companies we looked at found that, in the crunch, the vertical information flows framed by the hierarchical reporting relationships would swamp the less well-established horizontal links. To give muscle to the newer channels and forums of exchange, many companies found they had to formalise the cross-unit relationships that give them life" (*Ghoshal and Bartlett 1999 : 89*).

How do you formalise the non-hierarchical relationships? In essence it implies creating a specific structural configuration, a network of interdependence. The *Viable Systems Model* of *Stafford Beer* has provided the systems thinking basis for designing the structural configuration as depicted in **Figures 12 and 13**. At the simplest level, this has involved creating horizontal teams and giving them tasks which involve a high level of interpersonal and cross-unit collaboration.

I still could not achieve a shared commitment for the governance of the Human Resources Department. The direction basis was already laid down in terms of the three S1-operational teams. More attention to the multi-dimensionality of the mindset was needed. We decided, as a team, to critically reflect on our progress with the process of improving the interrelationships and interactions on the basis of "our" *Viable Systems Model* depicted in **Figure 12 and 13**. The model depicted in **Figure 15** has been used as the method for critical reflection.

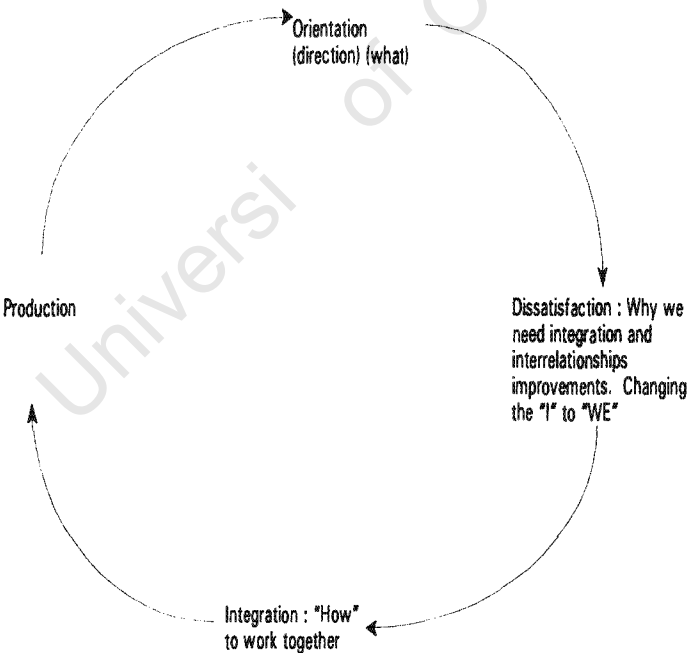


FIGURE 15 : MODEL FOR TRANSFORMATION

Support that would encourage team work and interdependence with other teams has to be given. It was important, at this stage, to focus on the aspect of learning within the Human Resources System. "Experience does not create learning, learning must be structured within a controlled and well-designed framework. One way of contributing to organisational learning is through confronting old patterns and spearheading new ones. A fundamental flaw in trying to achieve cross-functional and interpersonal collaboration is that it is not managed as a learning and change project.

Learning is synonymous with change management. If any profound transformation is expected, organisations have to manage a variety of things through direct and indirect reasons of encouraging learning. Successful change relies on changing people's mindsets (how they behave). This is the only way for creating the necessary ownership and commitment to ensure peoples creative contributions to achieve sustainable transformation. Effective transformation requires teamwork and dynamic visual interaction.

"Above all the change process is about people, and about unleashing their innate human potential to be the best they can be. If this is not recognised as the most fundamental principle of it all, bottom up and middle out changes lose their energy and meet with major barriers to change resulting in an eventual breakdown of the change program." (Wood 1995).

Employees are the lifeblood of the business, it is their skills and commitment that determine success. Any transformation process has to take into consideration the need for individual goals and needs, but unless individual learning is effectively integrated into team learning and motivation during the transformation process, sustainable transformation is difficult to achieve. If individual learning is not transferred to team learning, the learning process will be fragmented.

This notion is also strengthened by *Senge and Kim* who link individual learning to organisational learning through the concept of mental models as the transfer mechanism. This integrated framework (as cited in *Senge and Kim 1994 : 277*) is depicted in **Figure 16**.

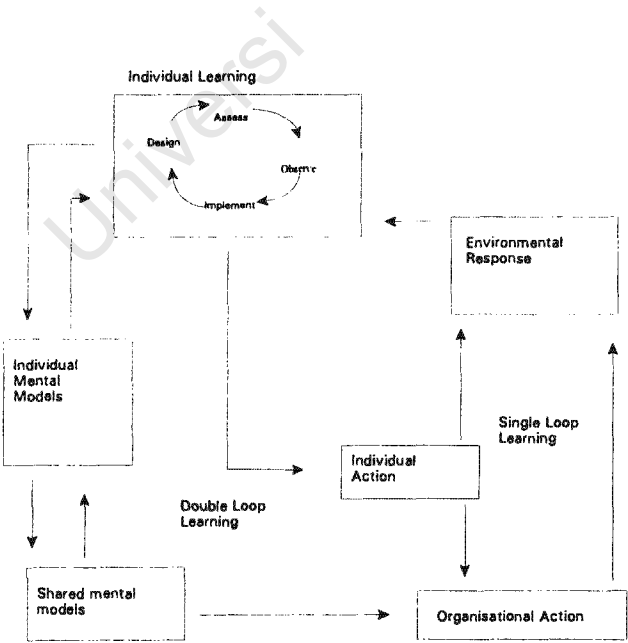


FIGURE 16 : THE INTEGRATED LEARNING MODEL

For effective collaboration, the individual members have to develop their ability beyond the level of the individual towards coordinated action or organisational action. Should this not happen single loop learning will occur. Organisational action is directly influenced by shared mental models. Individuals have to change their individual mental models or bring them in line with the organisations' shared mental models in order to ensure effective transformation. The challenge is to create a true, shared understanding, and thus a shared need to think collaboratively about complex issues and to channel it into innovative coordinated actions.

"In order to create a community of practice, individuals have to recognise that their effectiveness rests on their member's ability to learn from one another" (*Realin 1999 : 3*). They have to learn how to observe and experiment with their own collective tacit processes in action, while through doing this, learn to improve their performance. The key to cross-functional collaboration is to teach participants how to become observers of their own interactions as this can accelerate their own development by exposing team members to one another's potential contribution as well as to the team's overall needs. Continuous improvement requires a management paradigm shift which includes a shift from individual learning to team or organisation-based learning (*Mittlei, Shani and Meiri 1999 : 2*).

Any attempt to improve operational performance has to address the barriers associated with the structural inertia of the organisation. To achieve this, some kind of learning structure has to be created which will be conducive for learning and continuous improvement.

Through the Human Resources VSM framework, a learning system was constructed which served as the vehicle for continuous improvement. It is a systemic learning process which helps the different S1-operational teams to foster a system-wide learning synergy. The process followed can be classified as an action learning process. The S1-teams have to work with real problems with the intention of getting things done efficiently. The S1- teams each have taken forward an important issue with the support of the members of the other S1-teams. This can be regarded as learning through actions. "Action" because the group is more than just a simple support group; each S1-team takes action on their own issues after reflection with the group. "Learning" because the opportunity to reflect on experiences with the support of others followed by actions means that members engage in learning from experience in order to change, rather than simply repeating previous patterns of behaviour.

My role as facilitator was to create an environment conducive to learning, not to teach and instruct. During the formal meetings the purpose was : to support individuals in reflecting on their past actions in order to learn from experience; and to explore the issue in order to assist in the planning of their next actions. In both these actions, the quality of the reflection is the key to success. The learning models depicted in **Figure 16** have strengthened the reflection process.

During this learning process specific attention was given to critically asking questions such as:-

What ?
How ?
Why ?

This is what *Reg Revans* was referring to when he proposed that in a changing world people should be masters in the act of posing questions. The learning process followed also has focussed on an important organisational problem and has been managed as a specific project. The systems approach achieved what *Einstein* has said about personal development

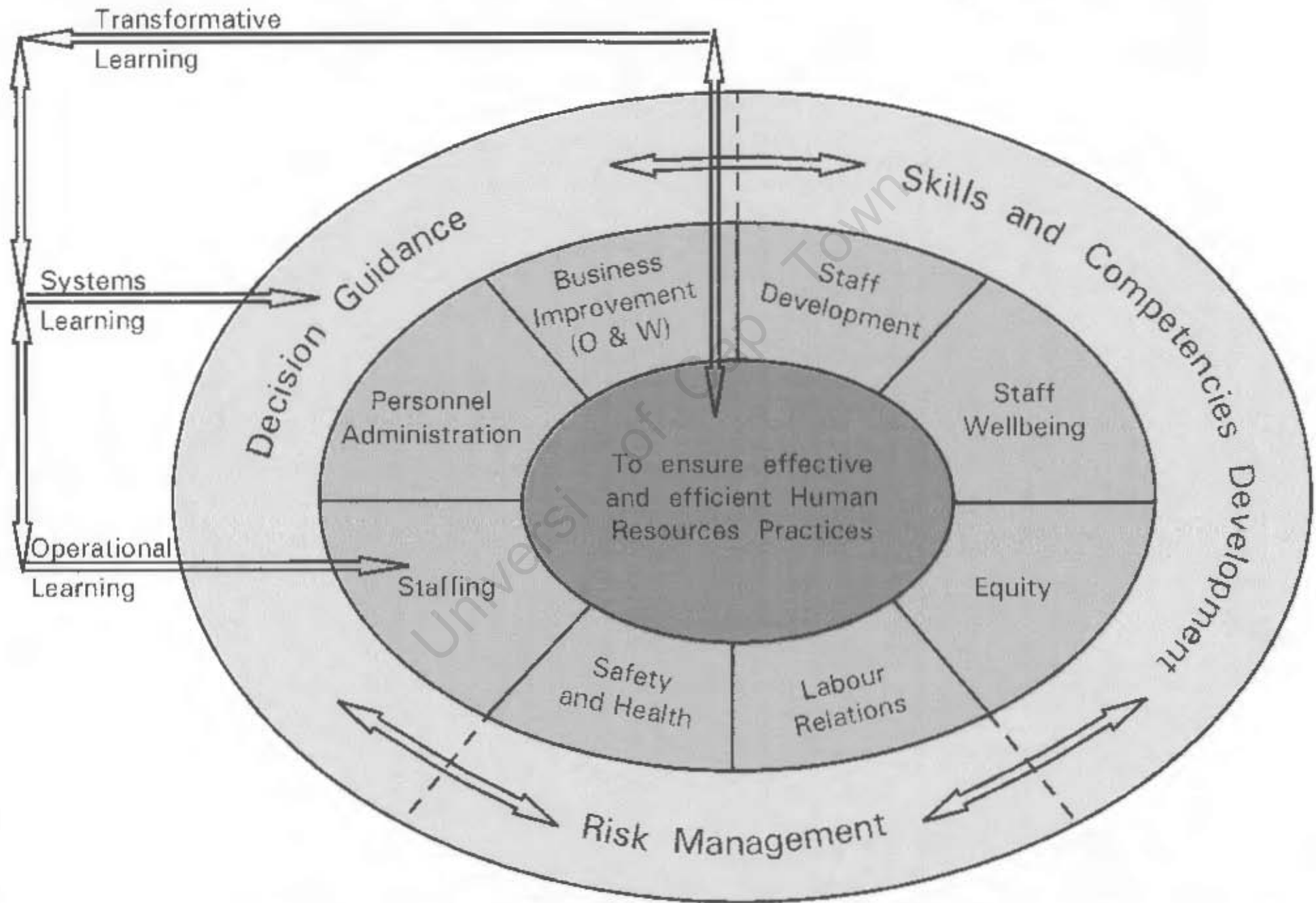
"I do not teach my pupils, but provide conditions in which they can learn." The necessity to create a new way of thinking and the barriers of such efforts are expressed by the theorists quoted hereunder.

"We do not know much about how to be an effective member of an organisation that is learning. We only know how to be a member of a bureaucracy with its responsibilities spelled out by the reporting relationships of the hierarchy. As soon as we start down the road we stopped by the roadblock of what is." (Dixon 1999 : 5) "Our thinking about these matters is hampered by one major, deeply embedded cultural assumption so taken for granted that it is difficult even to articulate. This is the assumption that all organisations are fundamentally hierarchical in nature, and that management processes are fundamentally hierarchical. We need new models, but we may have difficulty in testing them because of the automatic tendency to think hierarchically. Organisational learning is an innovation to invent these new models; but we will have to invent them together. It is time to begin dialogue. We have to focus on improving how we work, think and interact" (Schein 1993 : 63).

"It is my belief that all forms of learning and change start with some form of dissatisfaction or frustration generated by data that disconfirms our expectations or hopes". "Disconfirmation is not enough, however, because we can ignore the information, dismiss it as irrelevant, blame the undesired outcome on others or fate, or, as is most common, simply deny it's validity. In order to become motivated to change, the people involved in the system have to accept the information and connect it to something they regard as of importance. This disconfirmation must arouse what we call "survival anxiety" or the feeling that if we do not change we will fail to meet our needs or fail to achieve some goals or ideals we have set for ourselves" (Schein 1999 : 3).

The functions of the Human Resources Department as a system have been strengthened through focussing on the three interrelated learning processes, being operational learning, systems learning and transformative learning. **Figure 13** supplemented with the three mentioned learning processes is depicted in **Figure 17**.

FIGURE 17: The Human Resources Systemic Learning Model



Operational learning forms the foundation of any organisation. It relates directly to the operational domain of the system. It can also be labelled individual or organisational learning while systems learning relates to the concept of the learning organisation by which we mean learning by the organisation as a total system. Systems learning focuses on the organisation as a complex of interacting systems which includes operational learning but focuses primarily on the fundamental assumptions that shape the organisations behaviour. This learning process is vital for understanding relationships and interacting processes within any system. Transformative or transformational learning incorporates operational and systems learning. This can be labelled as the "how" of the three learning processes and it is directly related to the aspects of explicit and tacit ("know-how") knowledge. Transformational learning focuses on the cultural changes needed to ensure that the necessary behaviours needed are "produced". This relates to the domain of human activity.

It is important that the operators have a good understanding of how specific sub-units are systemically interconnected and that it takes cooperation and teamwork to increase the systems operational effectiveness. "Learning is ultimately a social process that occurs in a community of practice. Ideas are not enough until those relationships and interactions are embedded in the daily routines of practitioners they have not really been "learned" (transformed). This is specifically applicable to transformational learning where the new practice is based on new cultural assumptions" (Shein 1999 :6).

Improving control and coordination of the internal work-processes and functions requires improved interrelationships and interactions of the system. The *Viable Systems Model* of the Human Resources Department links the three learning processes and clearly demonstrates interpersonal as well as cross-functional collaboration through inter-team relationships. It clearly indicated the inter-team boundaries, as well as emphasising the principle of team interaction across functional teams. Transformed relationships are a critical part of changing behaviour within a system. The S1-operational teams display the systems theory of building connectedness within teams and between teams and evoke a mental model of collaborative partnerships. It is these improved relationships and connectedness that enables the Human Resources Department to achieve higher results.

The mental model of "interconnected relationships" empowered the team to analyse business situations from a interpersonal and a cross-functional systemic perspective. It is a structure that encourages the integration of individual learning with the learning organisation or in Shein's words "single loop learning with double loop learning". The heart for improving the management of operations (controlling and coordinating internal business operations) is the essential relationships that interconnect that business as a system. Thinking in terms of relationships provides a systemic method for changing the thinking of the people involved in the system. This is the process of helping people to see things differently and act differently.

The dominant frames being embedded in organisational procedures raises the question whether people can simply step outside of themselves by deciding to see the organisational world in a new way. "Such action parable ignores the "circumtextual" features of dominant frames - that is, the circumstances in which the frames have developed and the practices in which these have become inscribed" (MacLachlan and Reid 1994 : 4). The answer to this question is no. One has to address these "circumtextual" features of the dominant frame. Effective cognitive restructuring requires opportunities for the people involved in the system to practice the required community of practice. Cognitive restructuring seeks to change established ways of thinking and identifying new or alternative ways of "acting" to habitual or traditional ones. Cognitive structures shape cognitive processes, which in turn shape organisational actions; action is followed by cognitive activities of sense-making,

The *Viable Systems Model* of the Human Resources Department provides a cognitive structure that is required for new creative models of "working". The model provides a re-framing framework for the undoing of sedimented thought processes and practices. In the third cycle of this action research project, the focus was to strengthen cross-functional collaboration through a specific project. The specific project was "to produce a profile of the workforce composition of Blaauwberg Municipality's staff establishment as on 31 July 1999 in accordance with the Employment Equity Act. This project was of such a nature that it required the involvement of all three S1-operational teams. The three aspects of What, How and Why has been purposefully addressed.

- WHAT : an analysis of the workforce profile of the existing staff establishment as on 31 July 1999 in accordance with the Employment Equity Act.
- HOW : On a team basis approach - it is a process that bundles together data collection, interpretation and research and it involves the individual, interpersonal (within S1-teams) and cross-functional collaboration (total Human Resources System).
- WHY :
- To strengthen the aspect of interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration for the improvement of operational effectiveness and efficiency.
 - To strengthen interrelationship and interactivity within the Human Resources System.
 - To reconfirm the importance of developing new cognitive frameworks.

The project also highlights the integrated learning processes, these being, operational, systems and transformational learning. The principal of self-management and accepting shared responsibility for the governance of the outcome of this project was also agreed to by the team. There was a strong focus on the working relationships between the three S1-operational teams. The result was a visible improvement in the Human Resources Departments' work-process and in the work behaviour. There was a better understanding of the interrelationships and interdependence of functions within the Human Resources Systems. The Negative Reinforcement Cycle defined in **Figure 8** can now be reflected as a positive reinforcement cycle as depicted in **Figure 18**.

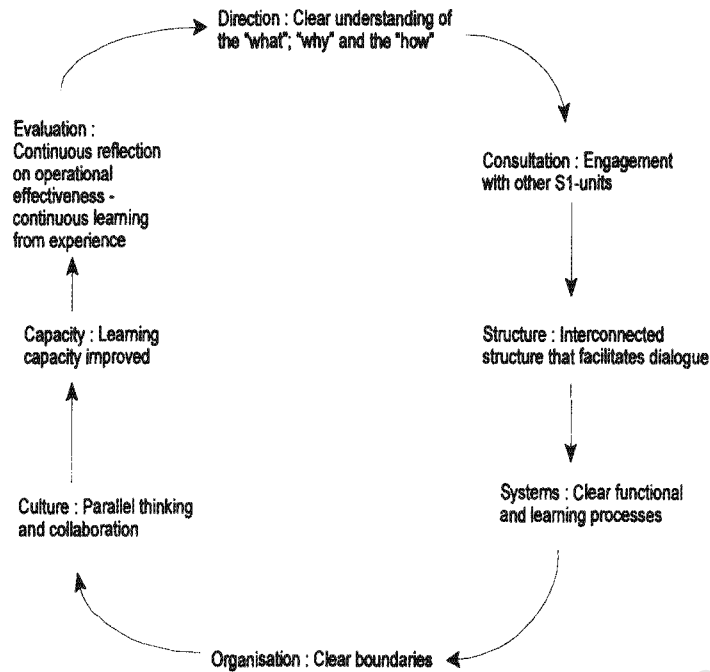


FIGURE 18 : CYCLE OF POSITIVE RE-ENFORCEMENT

Conclusion

My claim is that a structural technical configuration is not sufficient for efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. The world today is a world of relationships. The effective management of relationships and interactions, which in the end will result in improving the coordination of actions, requires a purposeful reconstruction of the behaviour of people. Behaviour will only change if people's reductionist thinking and their mindset of addiction is reconstructed. This requires a systemic learning process and can be best achieved on a project basis. Peoples thinking and actions have to be conditioned to support new patterns of behaviour and actions. A new mental model has to be constructed. The organisation is formed through peoples interactions and it is important that a mental model of interdependence, thus a mental model which will ensure efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration, be purposefully constructed. This will also ensure a multi-disciplinary instead of a functional silo focus . Efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration has been achieved through "reorienting the Human Resources professional's 'functional mindset'". This can be achieved through systems thinking as the systems theory focuses on interconnectivity and interrelationships within a system and between the system and its environment.

In the next chapter I will explain what the contribution to knowledge of this thesis is, what is now understood that was less understood before. I will discuss my contribution to the action research methodology and highlight methodological problems faced. I will also discuss the contribution to my Human Resources Department (client system) as well as the changes which have occurred as a result of this action research project.

PART 4 :

**CONCLUSION, CONTRIBUTION TO THE
ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AS
WELL AS TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES
SYSTEM (CLIENT SYSTEM) AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this action research study the following important conclusion has come :

- *to change the way in which people relate to each other, requires a balanced approach, an approach which balances the technical and social elements of the organisational change.*

There is a high level of interdependence between the “hard” structural factors and “soft” human, social and organisational factors. For effective change, sufficient attention has to be given to the aspect of changing the cognitive mindset of the persons involved in the system.

People must purposefully review and rethink interdependencies and interrelationships to ensure better team functioning and a high quality of interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. The higher the quality of interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration, the lesser the need for coordination (command and control) on the level of the manager. Through the application of the principles of systems thinking and cybernetics, it is possible to develop a coordinated intensive structure where coordination becomes the responsibility of the team. Business improvement initiatives such as business process re-engineering and total quality management interferes with the network of informal relationships. Through systems thinking the structural as well as the social system necessary for business survival can be properly constructed or reconstructed. Systems thinking provides a sound basis to create and maintain a reconfigurable organisation which is, in the world of constant change, very important for survival.

In this chapter I discuss the contribution of this action research study to the action research methodology as well as to the client system, being the Human Resources Department. Although, in this study the aspect of generalisability was not the primary concern, but to bring about a positive improvement to a practical problem situation. Due to the positive results achieved, I do believe that any organisation can more constructively improve the management of change, more productively solve problems, enhance team functioning and the reconfigurability of their organisation through systems thinking. Systems thinking promotes critical thinking, a much needed skill for business survival. “The ability to spot the right problems and then formulate them correctly is the crucial skill that all workers, managers and top executives must possess to successfully compete in the twenty-first century. Organisations that know how to think critically will dominate. Individuals who know how to think critically will make better decisions in their lives” (Mitroff 1997, preface).

6.1 METHODOLOGICAL FINDINGS

The purpose of action research is to improve a situation through first improving the researchers' understanding of the situation and secondly to ensure the necessary change through collaborative action. The key to success is to have a clear

understanding of the problematic situation, to collaboratively plan the specific intervention required to address the problematic situation and to reflect whether the intervention has eventually effectively changed the problematic situation.

In this regard I experienced in practice, a confusion between the observation and the reflection phases of Kemmis and McTaggart's Methodological Action Research Framework as depicted in Figure 3. The reason is while one is in the process of observation you are also in the phase of critical reflection. These two phases are very closely linked and, as a researcher, I changed *Kemmis and McTaggart's Research Framework* as depicted in **Figure 19.**

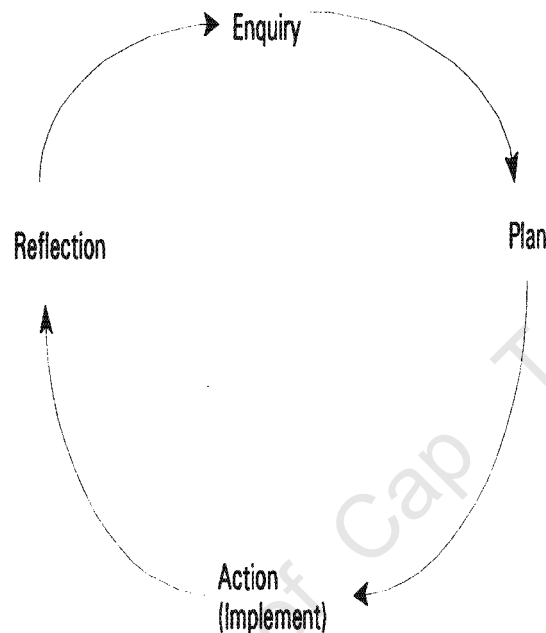


FIGURE 19 : ACTION RESEARCH INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

Action research is learning in practice. The methodology of action research is the same as action learning and can also be referred to as action research learning. I believe that action research learning is a very effective methodology to promote transformational learning as it links thinking and action. The phrase "that if you want to understand a system, try to change it" (*Kurt Lewin*) is very relevant in this action research learning context, as this methodology's success depends on a clear understanding of the problematic situation of which the system is an integral part. My experience with action research learning is that it is an effective and efficient method for leadership development. The reason for this is that the leaders role and effectiveness is also being critically evaluated during the process as the leader cannot isolate himself or herself from the situation being researched. It is specifically related to process orientated leadership, because it is the process (how a person, group or organisation functions) that determines the quality of the content (what they achieve) (*Action Learning Notes, 1999 : 5*). My own experience is that through the action research learning process I have become more sensitive and skillful in my managing of the relationships between context (situation), theory (generating plausible answers and plans to deal with the questions arising from the context) and practice (refer to the

content or what has been achieved). This relationship is depicted in **Figure 20**.

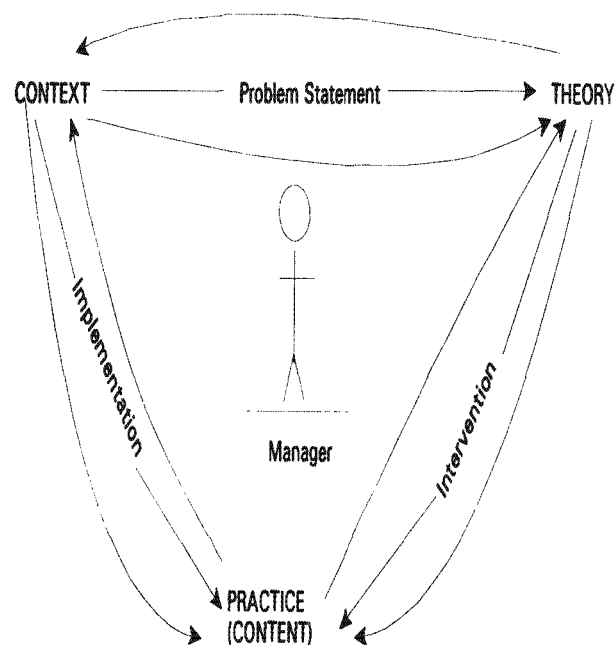


FIGURE 20 : RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTEXT, THEORY AND PRACTICE

Action research learning provides a methodology framework for the effective management of a cooperative learning process. It can assist in continuous improvement initiatives as it is concerned with improving how we work, think and interact with a focus on changing managerial practices. “Action learning research is an approach to education that emphasises the distinction between doing things myself and talking about getting things done by others in general ... to ensure that managers shall learn to manage better with and from another in the course of tackling the very problem that is in their proper business to tackle” (*Newton and Wilkonson, 1995 as sited in Koo. 1999 : 1*).

6.2 CONTRIBUTION AND CHANGES TO CLIENT SYSTEM

The client system in this action research project was the Human Resources Department. This department fulfills an integral part in the transformation process which the organisation is exposed to. The following can be highlighted as the major contributions and changes to the Human Resources Department :

6.2.1 Understanding System Dynamics

An important question in all change programmes is “What is required to bring about change in how people relate to each other ?” This research project has emphasised the fundamental insight that it is not possible to change relationships without working at them. This requires learning, assimilation and adaptation from all participants within that specific system. Systems thinking is a dynamic theory to transform peoples thinking and action due to the fact that it provides the necessary framework for participants to gain insight into the complex interdependencies between business functions.

The understanding of the participants in regards to the interrelationships, inter-connectivity and interdependencies between the different functions of the Human Resources Department has improved. There is a constant awareness of relationships and interactions within the system. The different functional specialists are drawn together in ways that bridge differences and focus on actions with collaboration. This is due to a shared relational network mindset. The foundation for a process management approach instead of a narrow task orientation has been framed. The process followed has transformed the hierarchical culture into a collaborative culture.

Due to this, the management of the coordination of the different functions within the Human Resources Department also improved. The critical concept of interdependencies within the Human Resources Department as a system and in specific the importance thereof for effective and efficient functioning has been framed. In essence we have increased the effective coordination or coupling across functions and activities so that the performance of the whole is greater than the performance of the sum of its parts.

6.2.2 Changing the Bureaucratic Design

The traditional hierarchical structure has been reconfigured into a new structural configuration and Human Resources processes that link operational, systems and transformative learning. The participants are in a position to continuously re-frame their relationships and interactions. My staff have become skilled interpreters of their own situations.

There is a sound understanding of how the different functions have to function synergistically in order to ensure operational efficiency. The different S1-operational teams contribute to decreasing complexity as it is reconfigured on a basis of “homogeneous” products. The Human Resources Departments’ “products” are also clearly defined.

The reporting relationships of the hierarchy have become less important. The “relational blindness” as a result of the hierarchical structure has been transformed into a shared relational mental model which is an integrated model for learning, thinking and actions. It allows for interaction and interdependence and provides a systems approach to team development. It is a collaborative structure for the promotion of dialogue and conversation.

The process followed as well as the result of the systems learning framework as depicted in **Figure 17** has increased the teams ability to be reconfigured in order to pro-actively respond to demands in its external environment. The S1-operational "teams" have replaced the hierarchy. The functional organisation remains as a stable structure around which reconfiguring takes place.

6.2.3 Improve Team Functioning

Through this action research project the participants increased their understanding for the reason why the Human Resources Department has to operate as a team and not as isolated silo's. Teamwork has been redefined as the coordination of individual activities for pragmatic ends.

The loss of power which is one of the main reasons for the failure of matrix organisations has been overcome through not replacing individualism with groupism. The team has accepted that in order for the Human Resources Department to be effective and efficient, teamwork is of vital importance.

My staff are now in a better position to see each others issues from different perspectives and this enhances effective team functioning. As the team became more skilled in working together, the better they dealt with intricate components which cut across two or more functional units. The team functioning process is depicted in **Figure 21.**

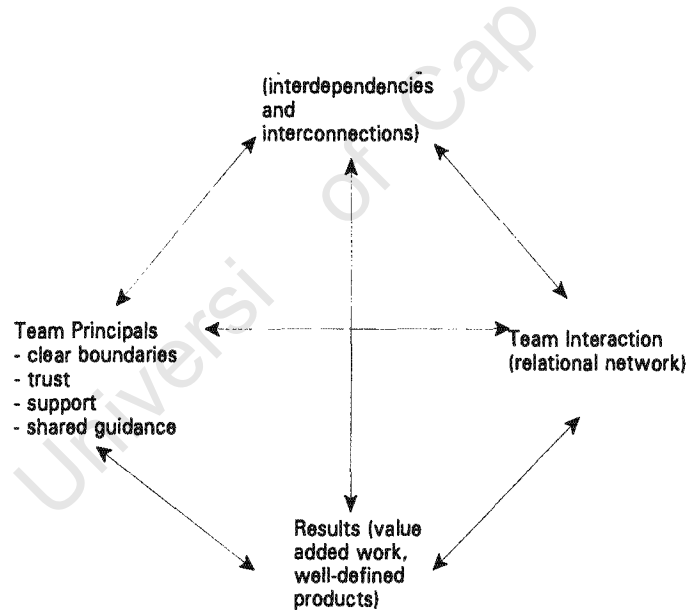


FIGURE 21 : SYSTEMIC TEAM FUNCTIONING

Systems thinking empowered the participants to deal more effectively with issues of interdependencies. The individuals are in a position to re-think patterns that connect and relate to different elements. There is also that realisation that if they really wanted their collaborative work to be successful they all have to "go the extra mile" to make sure it happens. The S1-operational teams through systems thinking principles enhanced synergy between previous separate work activities.

The relational structure provided a framework for the team to answer the question "how to work together as a team?" The ability of the team to think beyond the level of the individual to ensure higher operational performance is one of the major contributions of this action research learning study to the Human Resources System.

What has been highlighted is the need for innovative coordinated action - ensuring creativity and innovation while maintaining a team focus. The group's ultimate performance depends on how well the interdependencies and interrelationships in work-flow or work-products are planned, managed and performed. All staff understand why transformation is happening, how the new relationships are being structured in order to ensure effective sustainable organisational performance.

6.2.4 Continuous Improvement

The capacity of the team to continuously evaluate, as a team, the departments performance increased. The principle of critical reflection is now a practice. A learning cycle (loop) of design → implement → review furthers organisational learning. Due to the interactive nature of the systemic learning framework continuous and incremental improvements are able to be made. The functioning of the Human Resources Department has been reorganised through systems thinking to ensure maximum impact and to effectively measure the performance of the Human Resources Department.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.3.1 Contribution to Change Initiatives

Two of the most important questions in all change programmes are "What is required to bring about changes in how people relate to each other? How do we get people committed to participate with full commitment in change programmes?" The most effective change is brought about through teams of people learning and understanding the requirements of a situation. Action research provides a methodology which is very effective to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of change programmes. The reason for this is that the participants within the system aim to change through increasing their understanding of the specific situation. The participants create a shared understanding of the situation and are actively involved in deciding what intervention has to be implemented to change the situation. They are also active participants in implementing the required interventions. Design and implementation are of equal importance and are closely linked to each other.

It is my contention that action research adequately and purposefully addresses the what, the why and the how of a change situation. The necessary learning, assimilation and adaption which are fundamental requirements for successful change are also important elements of action research.

I can, therefore, recommend action research as a methodology for change initiatives as it is a powerful methodology for building of shared mental models of a situation and generates higher levels of participation and commitment. It supports and encourages a process management approach rather than a "quick fix" solutions approach.

6.3.2 Productive Problem Solving

"Before we can solve a problem effectively we must first formulate it correctly. All serious errors of management can be traced to one fundamental flaw, and that is solving the wrong problem precisely, or muddled thinking" (*Mitroff 1998 :8*). It is crucial to formulate the problem correctly and to achieve this each problem deserves to be challenged in the strongest possible way by asking tough questions. The hidden part of problems can bring great grief if they are not properly considered. It is of utmost importance that the problem solver answers two questions :

- Which problem am I trying to solve ?
- What is my fundamental goal ?

"If you don't answer these two questions, all you have is solutions chasing problems. The old adage "when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail" is of relevance in such a situation." (*Andrews : 1996 :1*)

Both *Mitroff* and *Andrews* accentuate the importance of the process of formulating the problem. They also argue that most problem solvers only solve problems relating to the technical or "hard" structural aspect of the problem. Nothing exists by itself and it is the hidden part of problems which can bring great grief if they are not properly considered. Successful solutions hinge a variety of interrelated elements and dimensions. Problems therefore have to be analysed from a multi-perspective view point and not solely on technical aspects.

The systemic dimension (perspective) of a problem is one dimension which problem solvers usually neglect and this results in a situation of solutions chasing problems. *Mitroff* as well as *Andrews*, therefore, give much attention to the systemic perspective of a problem. Systems thinking can help us to build quality and productivity into problem solving right from the beginning. It concentrates on the underlying interrelationships between the different aspects of the problem and assists in picturing solutions in their whole. Systems thinking empowered my staff and myself to following a multi-perspective viewpoint with regard to problems. Much attention was given to interconnectivity and interrelationships through the systems approach. It has assisted in identifying causes and relationships. I, therefore, can recommend that in order to solve problems effectively and efficiently, problem solvers have to learn how to apply systems thinking to problem situations. The systemic perspective of a problem has to be carefully considered and through systems thinking this can be achieved.

6.3.3 Efficient Team Functioning for High Quality Interpersonal and Cross-functional Collaboration

Systems thinking promotes the principle that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” and, therefore, implicitly emphasises the importance of team work. Through systems thinking the participants gain insight in regard to how the different parts or functions operate and why it is necessary that they are interconnected in a specific way within that system for effectiveness and efficiency. There is a better understanding of why and how participants operating within that system have to be interconnected in order for the system to function productively.

The interdependence of the different functions or activities can be clearly “modelled” through systems thinking. This mental construct of interdependencies and interrelationships assist the participants within that system to think and act in terms of relationships, thus a multi-functional focus. Systems thinking empowers people to think in terms of flows. I can, therefore, recommend systems thinking as a methodology to reconstruct teams in order to ensure the necessary interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration required for high performance.

6.3.4 Overcoming the Limitations of Hierarchical and Matrix Organisations : Creating a Reconfigured Organisation

Reconfiguration refers to the ability of the organisation to pro-actively “restructure” in order to respond to changes or opportunities in its external environment.

The value of the systemic learning model depicted in **Figure 17** is that it is systemic in nature and promotes relationship thinking. While the formal organisational (hierarchical) structure hampers multi-functional efforts the systemic framework promotes a multi-functional approach without threatening the functional domain of the participants.

The reconfigurability of the Human Resources Department is located within the S1-operational teams. The functional organisational structure remains as a stable structure around which the reconfiguration takes place. The S1-systemic teams operate outside the formal structure with the purpose of integration of activities across processes. The functional structure is supplemented with systemic teams and these teams reconfigure as circumstances necessitate. The focus is on interdependencies of functions to ensure effective and efficient processes. It ensures that the S1-teams coordinate and monitor crossing or interrelated issues. The result is a lesser need for command and control from the manager.

The systemic learning structure recognises the important role of the people factor in organisational success or survival. It does not treat people as if they are bits and bytes or interchangeable parts to be reengineered. Due to its humanistic focus, it ensures a social system which is highly efficient and committed. The relational structure promotes systemic thinking which is required for transforming thinking into collaborative actions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the contribution of my research to the action research methodology and the contributions to changes within the Human Resources Department. Systems thinking can improve the quality of change programmes, problem solving, team functioning and enhance the reconfigurability of an organisation. It is, therefore, recommended that due to the complementing strengths of systems thinking, the latter be utilized as the foundation in change programmes, problem solving, team functioning and organisational design. Systems thinking contains the necessary ingredients to improve one's managerial practices. Systems thinking provides a methodology to fundamentally transform the nature of work and the way in which it needs to be organised and managed.

In the next chapter I discuss my critical reflection on my handling of the project, its relevance and validity and my learning.

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PART 5 :
CRITICAL REFLECTION

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON MY HANDLING OF THE PROJECT, ITS RELEVANCE AND VALIDITY AND MY LEARNING

Organisations striving for sustainable development need new mental models for thinking about their business and new ways to achieve sustainable, internal and external collaboration. On the surface, getting people to collaborate in ways that support collaborative work-processes and interaction seems straightforward. The success or failure with any transformation process is highly dependent on the leadership and support of the leader who initiates or "drives" the transformation. The purpose of this study was to enhance the operational efficiency of the Human Resources Department through higher quality interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. Efficient interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration has been achieved through the improvement of my management of the interrelationships and interdependencies within the Human Resources Department. The latter could only be achieved through a well designed systemic structure and the construction of a relational network in the mindset of the individuals involved in the Human Resources Department.

7.1 HANDLING OF PROJECT

This project is an action research study and, therefore, followed a cyclical approach. As explained in Chapter 2 there were basically three main cycles, being :

- cycle 1 : requesting my staff to improve the co-ordination of their interactions;
- cycle 2 : designing a systemic / cybernetic framework which provides the "configuration" for understanding the interrelationships, interdependencies and interactions within the Human Resources Department;
- cycle 3 : purposefully addressing the aspects of thinking and learning (cognitive restructuring) through a "project" which entails a high level of interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration, supplementing systemic thinking with transformative, systems and operational learning.

The cyclic method of plan, act, observe and reflect is similar to the *Deming Cycle* of continuous improvement of plan, do, check and act as well as to the learning loop of observe, assess, design and implement. In all three cycles the crucial element is the element of critical reflection and observation. Critical reflection is a critical aspect of this research project. A very important aspect was the commitment of my staff to this research project and I was compelled to socially construct the situation as a real work phenomenon and not only as an academic exercise. As all my staff's operational domains were affected in one or more ways, the necessary commitment and involvement could be achieved. There was an acceptance that "we are all together in it" and only "we" can change the situation. *Deming's* philosophy that good

operations, best efforts, hard work and experience are not enough, but that everyone in the organisation must understand what changes are needed and the reasons for them were practiced in the handling of this project. As this project is based on systems thinking, I also constantly emphasised the basic systems thinking principles and how performance of the system is influenced if some of its sub-units do not align with the other sub-units.

There were times when I was frustrated as I could not get some of my staff to "think outside their boxes". In the beginning I was so "caught-up" with my role as researcher that it had a negative effect on the relationship between myself as the researcher and my staff. I started realising that I was busy with a transformation process within my department, a process that affects myself as the manager and leader and my staff in various ways. One of the major difficulties with developing new avenues of thinking that breaks from existing paradigms is the manner in which people often resist new ideas and argue it from a basis of justice. Transformation works through a human sub-system and to accomplish organisational change, issues of justice will always rise to effect the success or failure of change (*Virginia 1999 : 3*). The self-worthiness and the dignity of each of my staff members had been given special attention and had been treated in such a manner that the individuals could evoke the necessary "survival anxiety" in order to drive the process themselves.

I constantly focused on creating a balance between individualism and team synergy. *Deming* frequently reminded that "a leader must understand that a system is composed of people, not mere machinery, nor activities, nor organisation charts. It is the people who in the end will have a critical influence on the success or failure of the transformation process. *Deming's* system of profound knowledge has basically four elements being (1) understanding of a system; (2) understanding of variation; (3) theory of knowledge and (4) psychology. The aspect of psychology addresses the issue of understanding the interaction of people with each other, with their environment and the system of management. In any change process the aspect of psychology within the context of *Deming's* system of profound knowledge is crucial.

It was specifically the procedural aspect of justice which has been addressed as this relates to the fairness of procedures used to determine the outcomes. Fair procedures matter to people because they are seen as instrumental to achieving favourable outcomes and are symbolic of one's standing in relation to others, and thus have implications for a person's self-esteem (*Lind and Tyler, 1988 in Folger, R. and Skarlicki, D.P., 1997*). This can also be labeled interactional justice and refers to the manner in which people were treated interpersonally during interactions and encounters in change processes. This change initiative required from my staff to do something differently such as working in "operational teams" and to change from individualism to teams was frequently met with resistance, due to the fact that they felt threatened.

The other aspect of justice linked to the specific results or outcomes of the change project, is called distributive injustice. It was of vital importance that people participating in the change process accepted the outcomes required. In this project the outcomes related directly to the Human Resources Department's operational performance. Each individual in the department contributed to this outcome in one way or another. The crucial outcome was to improve the operational efficiency of the Human Resources System through improving the managing of the relationships and interactions between and within the different operational units.

7.2 RELEVANCE AND VALIDITY

There is currently still much debate as to what kind of organisational structure best supports the organisation in achieving its objectives. In essence, which structure “best fits” the organisation in order to manage complexity. Many managers and organisations are diagnosing certain organisational problems and do the necessary interventions such as business process re-engineering, quality management, etc. Statistics have shown that up to 80% of these interventions have failed. Is there something wrong with these tools and techniques? The answer is no, they are not ineffective, for indeed most of them are quite valuable. The reason for the limited success is that they are implemented as a series of random programmatic interventions, when what is needed is a more fundamental systemic process. “A company cannot maintain its momentum and effectiveness just by implementing a series of tune-ups on a corporate engine that needs replacing” (Goshal and Bartlett 1997 : 11).

Improving the management of internal operations requires that specific attention be given to the aspect of coordination of relationships and interactions within a specific system or sub-system. Any effort to improve performance has to address the aspects of relationships, thinking and learning within a controlled and well-designed framework. It is today a given fact that business is driven by external changes. To properly react to these external demands, the continuous rethinking of the patterns that connect and relate different elements of the organisation and connect them with its environment is required. This is a process that bundles together data, collections, interpretations, research, experimentation and diffusion and involves the individual, team and total organisation. As such, improving organisational performance requires the development of a new cognitive framework and actions on an ongoing basis.

In today's world relationships are the business. Relationships need to be understood in a systemic framework. “Complexity arises from the interrelationships, interaction and interconnectivity of elements within a system and between a system and its environment” (Mittleton-Kelly as cited in Clarksen, P. 1998 : 3). Relationships today are primarily managed on a hierarchical manner which results in reductionist thinking and fragmented learning. Overcoming the limitations of hierarchical systems is a pre-requisite for organisational success. The organisation has to develop teams which are autonomous, self-learning and self-organising in order to ensure organisational success. The focus is on building a systemic group where people learn from their own activities and interactions within the group. The systemic structural framework is a general conceptual framework for dealing with the dynamics responsible for the complexity within our Human Resources function. The department functions as a self-organising system. The complexity within the function is dynamic due to the nature of the change drivers. The focus is on learning with complex dynamics which is made possible through well developed S4 (intelligence) and S2 (coordination) functions.

“One reason why hierarchies grow as the main paradigm for organisational structures is that they offer a useful model for accentuating structural complexity, thereby helping to make the managers job more manageable.” (Espejo 1997 :7). This world functions through a chain of human activities involving many people in constant interactions, with the potential for creating plans, making distinctions and implementing them. The effectiveness of this will depend on opportunities for

creating non-hierarchical organisations. All organisations need a degree of commonality of actions, which should not be confused with creating hierarchical structures. This commonality can help to handle complexity, provided a framework for promoting effective team work is being modelled. What is needed is to bring all parts of the organisation into a coordinated system. One of the problems of hierarchical organisations is highlighted by unfolding complexity in the large degree of fragmentation created.

Complexity is a direct result of relationships and interconnections within a system. The difficulties people often have in understanding complexity are rooted in a failure to grasp this novel underlying concept of a system being essentially a set of relations. The relationship between complexity and the performance is illustrated in **Figure 22**.

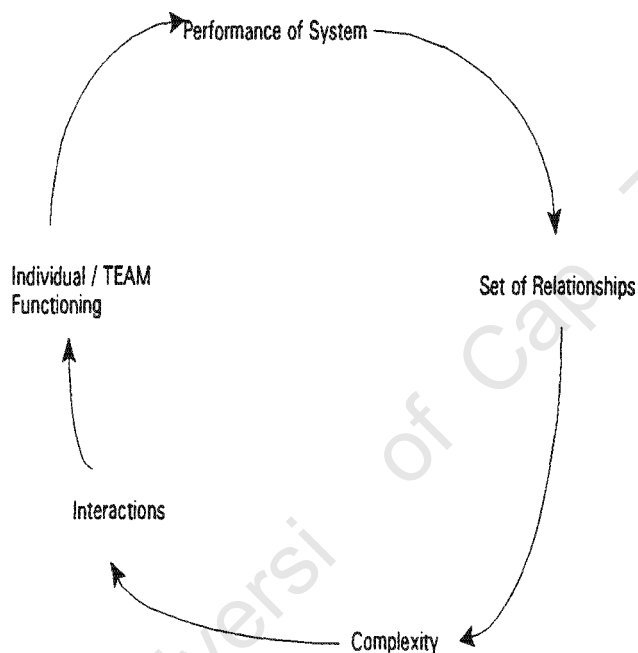


FIGURE 22 : RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AND COMPLEXITY

The performance of a system is influenced by the set of relationships of the different operating units within that system. Complexity increases or decreases if the set of relationships are poorly structured or understood and this influences the quality of interactions and the latter will affect individual team functioning. The quality of individual or team functioning will positively or negatively influence individual and organisational performance.

It is through interactions or conversations that people build their relationships. It is through relationships that people get work done, learn, understand their interdependence with others and develop a sense of belonging and inclusion. The notion of power is important to complex systems because power is the basis of all relations. This relates directly to the structure aspect of the system. The aspect of power-relations has to be addressed in order to enhance organisational functioning. The reason is that organisations are constituted by people's moment-to-moment

interactions in their operational domain. It is through these interactions that relationships are formed. It is in these interactions that certain "bumpings" take place. If these bumpings are de-constructive the system absorbs energy for conflict resolution instead of using that energy to achieve the purpose of the system.

The working alliance or operating alliance is the most important relationship as it is essential for survival. If there is clarity in definitions of the purpose and objectives of the working alliance, other relationships can flourish. On the other hand if the basic working alliance is not solid, everything will be undermined and there will be no business or organisation to speak of (Clarkson 1998 : 9). Deliberate attention to relationships is necessary to create a balanced organisation. We are all struggling to get to the future, and no-one can get there alone. All work emerges through relationships (Webber 1994 : 91). To create and maintain better relationships, all elements of the organisation need to be examined and brought into alignment so that they support the accomplishment of tasks while nurturing the community of relationships. It is still relevant and becoming more and more relevant to change the "smokestack principle" - meaning each unit only sees its little patch of the sky. Systems thinking is a sound basis for transforming current hierarchical structures into new structures that foster effective interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration.

The methodology of cybernetic and systems thinking is valid as it definitely changed our thinking from so-called "isolated" perspectives to a more horizontal perspective. This horizontal perspective has provided the basis for our teamwork, cooperation and collaboration - interpersonal as well as across the three S1-operational teams. There is an improvement in self-managing as the individuals have a clear understanding of the interdependencies and interconnectivity of the Human Resources Department's different functions. Control also changed from primarily hierarchical to monitoring and coordination of processes.

Another important deliverable of this project is that a foundation has been formed within the Human Resources Department for dialogue or conversation - in essence the basis for a "learning organisation". Individual learning is still there but not to the detriment of collective learning or "organisational learning". Through focusing on operational, systems and transformative learning there is a better understanding of the different S1-operational teams' boundaries as well as how the different S1-operational teams systemically interconnect. This supports transformative learning and enhances my staff's capacity to better manage their own interaction. Systemic thinking not only improves the understanding of autonomy but also the cohesion aspect of the Human Resources Department. The model developed on a basis of systems thinking and cybernetic principals provides an integrated framework for organisational learning where individual learning is linked to team learning.

7.3 WHAT DID I LEARN?

7.3.1 Managerial Self-awareness

Through this project I enhanced my knowledge of my own management effectiveness and efficiency. Managerial self-awareness is important because for individuals to be effective in influencing others, they must be aware of their own actions for the "target"

others. To be effective in interpersonal situations, self-insight (how completely and accurately one knows one-self) and interpersonal insight (how well one knows others with whom one interacts) is important. It was not only my own self-awareness which has been increased but also that of the team. Team members now have a better understanding of each others operational domains and how these operational domains systemically interlink and have to interact to be effective. The relationship between managerial self-awareness and organisational performance is depicted in **Figure 23**.

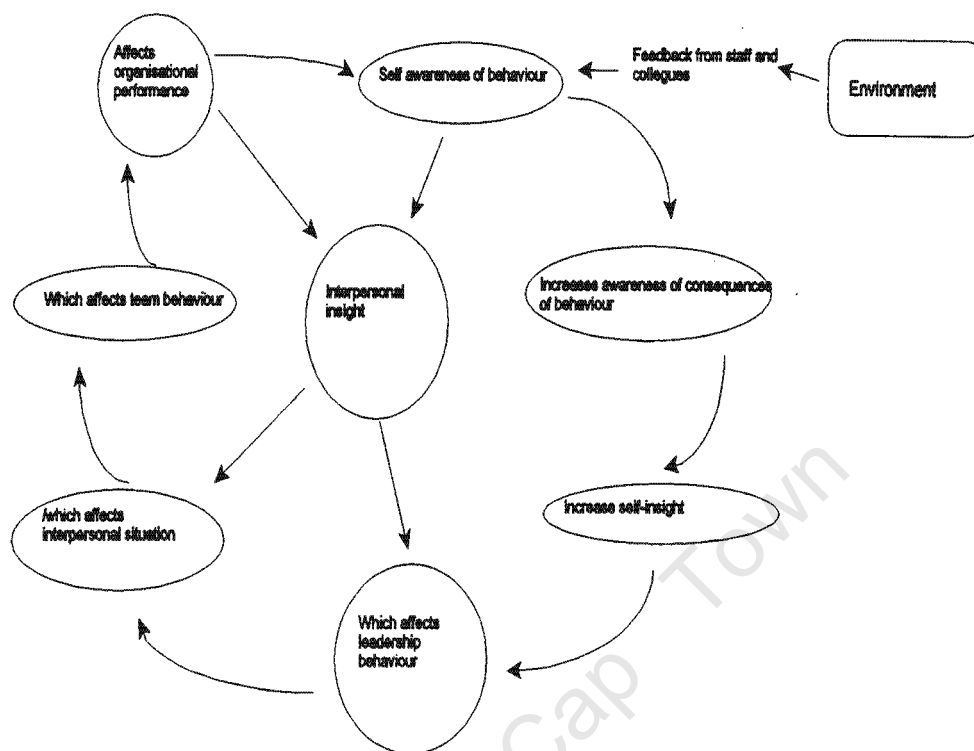


FIGURE 23 : RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MANAGERIAL SELF AWARENESS AND PERFORMANCE

7.3.2 Organisational Charts Are Not Sufficient; Relational Structures Are More Important

Organisational performance cannot be improved through the structural aspect of the organisations. It is the people within the structure that will determine, in the end, whether the performance of the system will improve or not. Effective teamwork cannot be achieved through the hierarchical structures as it is these structures which negatively influence the organisations ability to respond to change. Hierarchical structures represent a "arthritic" organisation characterised by autocracy, linear thinking, poor communication, lack of ownership and innovation and lack of synergy. It only supports hierarchical relationships and interactions.

The crucial aspects of interrelationships and interconnectivity are being neglected in the organisations. If the latter are not properly structured it will have a negative impact on the performance of the system. People need to "organise" themselves. In immune systems, armies of antibodies seek out bacteria in a systemic, coordinated attack, without any generals organising the overall battle plan. People seem to have a strong attachment to centralised ways of thinking, assuming that every pattern must have a single cause, an ultimate controlling factor.

The world and the world of business is changing. Rigid ownership of work is out and there is a greater need for fluid collaboration. More and more attention has to be given to developing policies and procedures that supports a team based environment. A key barrier to effective interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration is the failure of people to work well together in groups. However, if people have a good understanding of how their operational domains interlink and are interdependent from other operational units, it will enhance collaborative work-processes.

Peoples interactions in their operational domain form the basis for relationships and these relationships form, in a given space and time, the organisational structures supporting their actions. Conversations or dialogue are an effective mechanism to structure the forming of organisations. Intact work-team functioning can be improved through systemic work-teams and become a community of practice. Restructuring without a concomitant transformation of the way people behave and relate to each other within the new structure will prove of little value. Relational structures can improve interpersonal and cross-functional collaboration. The Human Resources Department's capability for effectively restructuring from the inside has been increased.

7.3.3 Managing Change

Any effective change process starts with the "I". It is the most important and most difficult and never-ending process. During this action research process I was forced to critically reflect on my managerial effectiveness. *Anwar Sadat* left us a part of his legacy a profound understanding of the nature of change. The basis of this can be summarised as follows: when faced with a complex situation you cannot hope to change it until you have armed yourself with the necessary psychological and intellectual capacity. He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality, and will never, therefore, make any progress. Our biggest challenge comes from understanding others. We have to develop the necessary sensitivity and tolerance to those whose needs are different from ours. Organisations can only change if individual members change. This implies that particular attention, effort, aspiration and creativity is required from change leaders and project managers.

It is imperative that leaders of change properly address the three key pillars of any change process, these being, defining and communicating the tangible and measurable deliverables and objectives (the what aspect of the change); design or use a methodology which generates real commitment and participation for the accomplishment of the objectives (the how aspect of the project) and the reason (s) and purpose (the why aspect of the project). The three aspects of what, why and how are essential to change an undesirable state to a desirable state.

Many change initiatives do not bring the necessary improvements forward due to a lack of attention to the human system issues. In this project the desired future state - describing new roles, functional and structural has been clearly constructed with the participation of my staff. It was, however, only after the what, why and how of the required change was clearly defined that my staff really changed their "working behaviour". The organisational aspect of change processes is usually well managed but managers tend to neglect the "soft" or human side. Re-engineering the thinking and learning process should be an integral part of the change process as it is vital for

change to be successful.

Specific attention has been given to the “how” aspect of the change process. A mental model was constructed which framed a collaborative partnership structure wherein individualism is not less important than the team. The systems theory of building connectedness within the teams and between the teams has constructively improved relationships and connectedness. This mental construct improved the coordination of actions.

Change and learning cannot be separate. There can be no change without learning, learning is a pre-requisite for change. Change needs a learning environment and learning and change must be structured within a controlled and well-designed framework. The viable systems framework as depicted in **Figure 17** provided this foundation and promotes change and learning. It improved my understanding that if you want to truly understand a system, try to change it. Change must go beyond structures into behaviours and relationships.

7.3.4 Problem Solution Orientated : Leadership Development

In the beginning of this course (February 1998) the following model was presented to us.

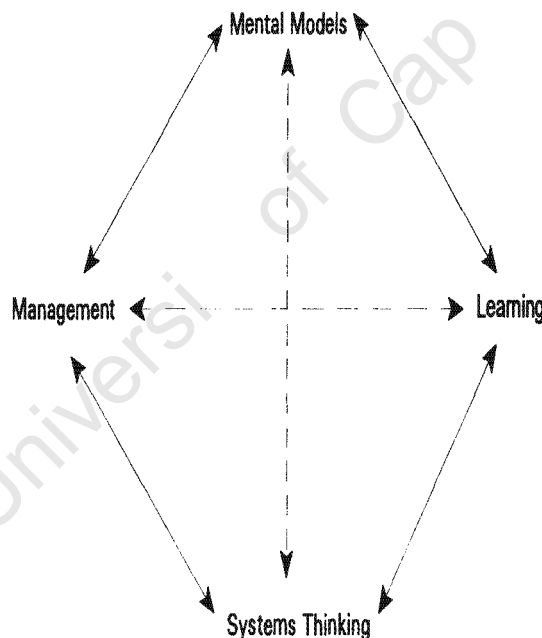


FIGURE 24 : A TOTAL SYSTEMS INTERVENTION MODEL

This model has provided me with a sound basis for dealing with organisational complexity. It is a systemic approach to problem solving, multi-disciplinary in nature,

emphasises the effects of interactions and promotes the principle of leadership action-driven learning. It does not focus on tools and methods rather on the methodology to promote sustainable organisational interventions.

There is a significant enhancement in my managerial and leadership competencies. It has disrupted my established way of thinking, identified conduct which is habitual or traditional and assisted in developing a more productive conduct to problem solving. I am, as a leader, more developed to facilitate group solutions as opposed to organisational focused interventions. New images do not result in actions, unless there is an appropriate degree of shared understanding and a will to act on the new insights. The total systems intervention model is highly systemic in nature and links the aspects of management, mental models, learning and systems thinking into an interconnected, interdependent and integrated whole. This model is in essence a new paradigm to solve complex problems. The key ingredient is that of understanding the problem situation.

To be effective with any organisational intervention one must have a clear understanding of the issues involved. The creativity phase of the systems intervention model provides, through the construction of mental models, a mechanism to create a shared understanding of the real issues involved within the problem situation. Through creating shared mental models individual learning is also linked to organisational learning. Single loop learning (treating only the symptoms and not the real causes) is changed into double loop learning (challenging the assumptions, values and structural causes). When individual mental models are changed into shared mental models and actions, double loop learning occurs. Managing organisational interventions to improve organisational performance requires from the manager to move beyond events and patterns to the structural-level of the problem. It is here that the real power of systems thinking is vital. Our ability to design and implement sustainable and viable organisational interventions increases as we move from the event level to pattern level to structural level thinking.

Through the systems intervention approach, people's paradigms of solving a problem are challenged. The paradigms people hold very often determine not only the goals they set for themselves, but also the road they take to get there. It is also effective methodology to review working relationships between different operational units and the co-ordination and communication between operational units. Systems thinking practice provides a sound understanding of how the structural elements operate together to provide an overall result. Understanding is the basis for more effective action. Understanding relationships between the elements of a system is a critical feature in understanding and managing complexity. The ability to see the major interrelationships underlying a problem is necessary to gain new insights about how to solve it. The systems intervention model allows for an appreciation of external and internal systemic influences on management practice.

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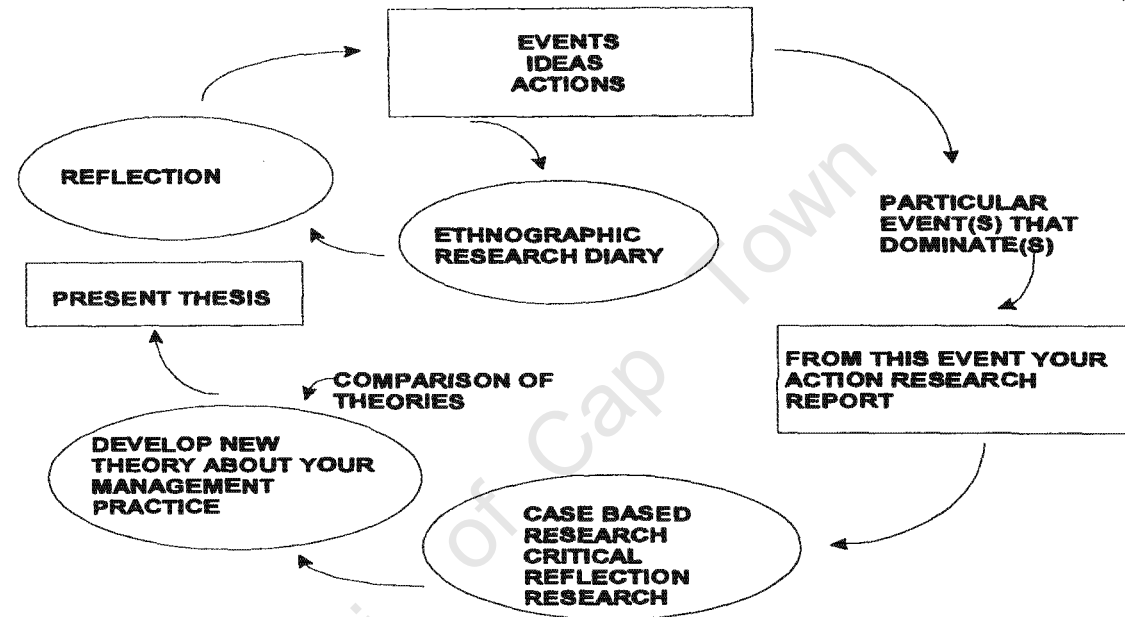
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ANNEXURE "A"
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

THE RESEARCH PROCESS



- WHAT IS IT THAT I AM GOING TO MONITOR- WHICH VARIABLES ?
- SOCIAL PHENOMENON WHICH IS WELL DOCUMENTED

ANNEXURE "B"
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Human Resources is having to survive and thrive in an environment of constant change, where outcomes are increasingly uncertain. This is exposing any Human Resources Department to disorientation, turbulence, confusion, conflict and uncertainty. In Local Government, this turbulence is increasing on a daily basis as we have to fulfill the role of leaders in the organisational transformation processes. The following pieces of legislation, for example, are some of the major causes responsible for this change :

- Basic Conditions of Employment Act
- Employment Equity Act
- Skills Development Act
- Municipal Structures Bill
- Municipal Systems Bill
- Restructuring for the Mega-City

The implementation of the above-mentioned legislation requires that the Human Resources Department be instrumental in the transformation process as it affects the employer as well as the employee. Meeting this challenge effectively within the Human Resources Department will require a new kind of courage and a different psychology from that which prevailed in the past. My role as Human Resources Manager is becoming a focus within my department, but also within the organisation as a whole.

The question arises as to whether there is a comprehensive approach or methodology to effectively manage the implementation of the legislation which, in effect, is nothing else but a transformation intervention in itself.

The following questions came to mind :

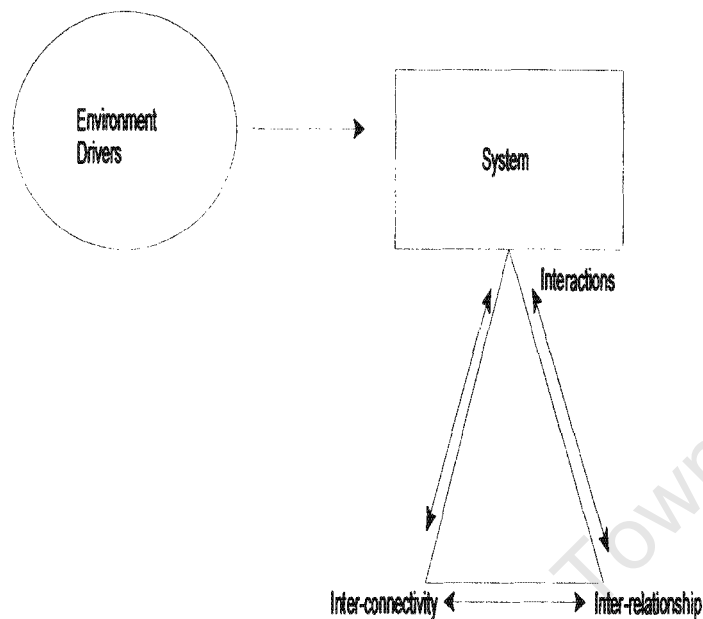
- What is it that I need to know?
- What is going on in my department?
- How and where am I going to find out?
- How do I check what I am doing?
- How do I use what I have found?

It is a fact that the management of Human Resources calls for effective partnerships amongst Human Resources professionals and operating line managers of the different functional areas. This challenge becomes even more demanding as processes and cultures that have to support the building of sustainable and constructive relationships become more complex, due to the constant changes in variables such as diversity, government compliance, workplace change and the need for the effective managing of participative work-processes and systems. The Human Resources Department's primary role is to assist and provide support to line managers in providing a contemporary workplace and workforce based on innovation, creativity, teamwork and professionalism. It is our responsibility to be the leader in improving the quality of the work life of all role players within the organisation. This can only be achieved through effective and collaborative work-processes. Team members have to, *inter alia*, synergistically build upon each others' work, align individual work with that of the team, and effectively communicate and coordinate in order to ensure effective and collaborative work-processes. Human beings live and breathe relationships; they learn and unlearn in relationships, not independently as isolated individuals.

What has changed most for me in today's working environment has been an awareness of the importance of relating with others.

At a macro-level, relationships are concerned with interpersonal, organisational and cultural processes. At the micro-level, relationships take intra-physical form in terms of how we relate with ourselves and manage internal conflicts. Complexity arises from inter connectivity, interrelationships and interactions within a system and between a system and its environment. This is a fundamental concept in complexity theory.

Complexity



The Human Resources Department as a subsystem within a system owes its effectiveness to the quality of interrelationships, interactions and inter connectivity of the different subsystems or functions internally, but also with that of the other subsystems within the whole, and with the external environment. The successful implementation of change processes requires, therefore, the effective managing of this complexity within any system.

Question 1: How do I create a shared understanding of this complexity and also the impact thereof in our learning and change processes?

This will require, *inter alia*, creating a systemic understanding of our work and re-creating our interrelationships within the Human Resources Department and with the rest of the organisation. It also reflects on me and how I manage this complexity within my department and that of my department with the organisation and its environment. I, therefore, have to critically reflect on my practice of managing the interactions, interrelationships and inter connectivity of the soft issues as well as the technical issues within the Human Resources Department.

The principle of effectiveness is the primary objective in any intervention process. In any process, one has to strive for maximum effectiveness. To function effectively as a whole it is necessary for any system, and its components, to interact effectively in some way, i.e., there must be some constructive way of communication and collaboration. This emphasizes the aspect of control - the means by which the whole entity retains its identity and/or performance under changing conditions. Control is dependant on the feedback of information or messages regarding the system is performing.

Recording of data

In thinking about the process of recording my data or collecting, the "actionable knowledge" of the situation, I ask myself the following question :

Question 1 :

What, in my opinion, are the salient features of the situation that reflect on my practice?

The following features emerged in my mind :

- staff are working strictly within their operational domains;
- there is limited cross-functional interaction between staff members who are involved in inter-functional processes or activities;
- there seems to be a lack of a coherent focus;
- collaboration in solving problems is neglected;
- the control or alignment depends heavily on me;
- there is a need to improve coordination and streamline communication;
- there is a lack of drive, innovation and creativity.

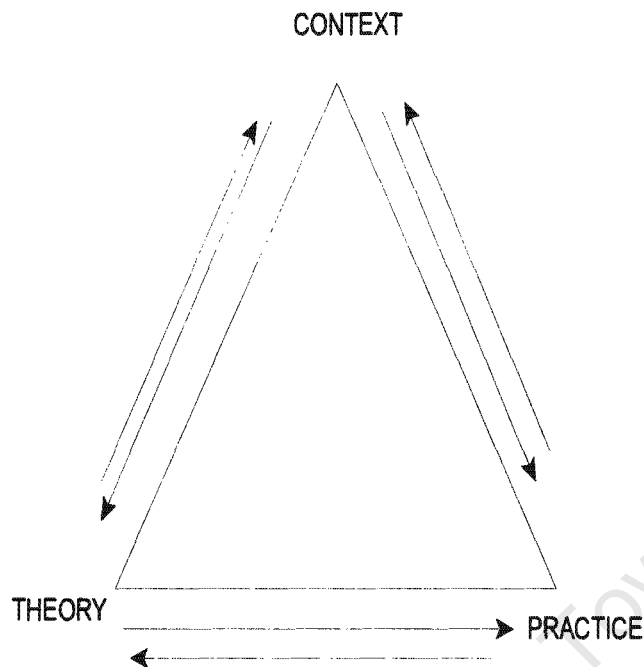
Question 2 :

Why do I think that the above-mentioned issues are the salient features? What evidence do I have for this belief?

The following reasons emerge in my mind :

- my own management style may advocate a hierarchical approach;
- as a team, we do not plan our actions effectively;
- my staff do not coordinate their activities, for example, disputes which arise from the selection process are being dealt with without the involvement of the labour relations section;
- the training section, which is responsible for induction training, and the personnel administration sections are not synchronised;
- there is no formal feedback into the system regarding work-related problems from the training officer, employment well-being officer, safety officer and the labour relations officer;
- the interaction between the organisation & work study, recruitment and selection and personnel administration sections, relating to the managing of the staff establishment is effective. This directly relates to interrelationships, interactions, inter connectivity and functional interdependencies;
- there is a lack of knowledge sharing;
- there is strong evidence of events management which leads to fragmentation, and in the end fragmented learning.

My question now is : How to create the necessary actionable knowledge for myself and my staff in order for us to agree on the above issues. The process can be depicted in the following diagram:



FIRST PHASE

Interviewing my staff :

Using the left-hand and right-hand columns. Refer to page 250 of Peter Senge's - The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook 1990.

The left-hand column will reflect my critical reflections/observations and key questions.

The right-hand column contains the primary narrative, it will tell either an individual perception or story, the group's input or my own observation of a specific situation.

Question 1 :

Give me your view on my management effectiveness with regards to the Human Resources Department

Principle Administration Officer (Staff member 1)

The feedback which I am giving is usually on critical incidents and tends to be on the negative side. There is no constructive feedback to motivate myself or other staff members.

If you give instructions, they are not always clear and I must provide more direction. I perceive you as highly task orientated, tending to neglect the people side. The collaboration and working alliance of the team are not good and need attention. We also need to strengthen our relationship with our staff as well as managers and their staff.

Question 2 :

How does your function interact with the other functions in Human Resources?

Internally we have to strengthen our horizontal and vertical interactions as the different units which have to work in collaboration with each other and interact on cross-functional issues do not do this.

Question 1

Employment Well-being Officer (Staff member 2)

I experience the fact that you manage from a distance and do not get involved directly in processes. It either means that you trust me or do not want to get involved in a function which is not too visible in the Human Resources Department. Your availability for feedback and support to myself and other staff members is an area of concern.

Question 2

There is an overlapping with certain other areas such as Training and Development as well as Labour Relations. There is, however, no consistent purposeful discussion with this function.

Not clear to what extent it needs interaction.

What about other functions such as Personnel Administration - where does he get his source for intervention?

Question 1

Organisation and Work Study Officer (Staff member 3)

I do not experience any problems in terms of interactions with you but things are still very unsettled within Human Resources. Staff are involved in so many things that we don't find time for proper planning and reflection. We need to give more attention to these aspects.

Question 2

Organisation and Work-study have links with a lot of other units within Human Resources, for example, the staff establishment control, recruitment and selection and personnel administration links to this function. It demands a work-process which binds these cross-functional units. Somebody has to take control of the work process flow in order to ensure an effective staff establishment control.

Question 1 & 2

Recruitment and Selection Officer (Staff member 4)

This person, at the time of the interview, had to report to the principle administration officer. I experienced a lot of conflict with the unions with regards to what their role, my role and line management's role was in the selection process. One union also only focussed on affirmative action and the lack of a guideline in this regard is problematic. This function is interacting with administration on a constant basis.

Do the different role players understand each other's operational domain? What is their shared understanding of this domain?

Lack of proper communication and cooperation due to a lack of understanding in the Human Resources System.

How to structure the functions of Human Resources into collaborative leadership cycles to enhance "community building" for planning, sharing and reflecting on results.

What about a key function such as organisation and work-study with regards to : Do we have to fill a post? What are the key functions of this post as well as key competencies, and how relevant are these functions and competencies?

Question 1

Senior Training Officer (Staff member 5)

Needs more specific guidance with regards to the overall strategy and direction in which the organisation is going. What are the major strategic drivers for the politicians and Senior management?

I (Senior Training Officer) do get the necessary guidance from you, but I am not always sure of the big picture of what I am doing - what is my (Training) mandate?

Question 2

Training interacts and interlinks with all other Human Resources units, but specifically to employment well-being as it concentrates on worker relations and work environment.

Communication between the different functions is not good, for example, the confusion between labour relations and training with regards to the industrial relations training session of senior management.

At the induction sessions staff ask questions that I cannot answer as they relate directly to administration issues. Horizontal interaction and roles have to be more structured as people do not understand each others' roles and functions. There is a great need for clarity in this regard.

Our biweekly meetings are not constructive in enhancing this relationship or horizontal interactions. Where the functions overlap, there has to be constructive interaction. Lack of interaction can have disastrous effects

as it has a direct impact on our team performance.

Our current meetings are more of an administrative nature and I (training) need more specific feedback of how my function interacts with other processes within Human Resources.

Question 1

How do I draw links between the subunits and results and put problems in a context that assists my staff in being more effective with their actions?

Safety Officer (Staff member 6)

I (safety officer) was previously a fire officer and was made responsible for safety in Milnerton. I have never really received any proper guidance for this function and am also utilised in other activities which have nothing to do with safety. Since you (myself) started, you have given me proper guidelines and support of how to make my function more effective. The business plan for safety which we have compiled provides the necessary structure. I (safety officer) have also, for the first time, written a formal report to senior management under your guidance. It took me quite a while to understand what you required, but it was a learning experience.

Question 2

Links with employment well-being and training - no further comments.

Question 1

Senior Labour Relations Officer (Staff member 7)

We are always on the run and do not really sit down to plan or discuss burning issues. There is always a time constraint on our interactions. I (senior labour relations officer) experience you as highly task oriented. Our interactions are, however, good but I

(senior labour relations officer) find that you don't really listen to me. I (senior labour relations officer) do think that you are an excellent facilitator in resolving conflict between management and the Unions.

Question 2

There is a feeling that the work load within Human Resources is not evenly spread - the load in my function seems to be much higher than that of, for example, employee well-being. My function, however, interconnects with all other functions within Human Resources, but there are not enough structured interactions. I do not know what each person within Human Resources is busy with. Our internal communication is also not good as I sometimes find the circulars are sent to external staff, but not to Human Resources staff.

How to structure in order to ensure effective partnering relationships within Human Resources?

There is a need to define Human Resources purposes and the roles of each function within Human Resources

How to create a shared understanding of the need for collaboration, communication and critical reflections?

Question 1

Senior Clerk (Staff member 8)
Person gives administrative support to me and to a lesser degree to the other Human Resources staff.

Sometimes I (senior clerk) experience you to be quite critical and forgetful of the dignity factor. Thought I (Manager) am too negative against our progress and performance. Our teamwork is however starting to improve.

Question 2

Did not really have any comments on this issue.

Administrative staff (Staff members 9,10 and 11)

The staff, at the time of this interview, reported to the principle administrative officer. We do not get proper guidance or direction. Training is a serious problem. We have a large amount of queries and staff just walk into our offices without making appointments. We do not get enough time for filing. The Payday system itself is not functioning effectively.

I do experience a feeling of frustration and negativity amongst my staff, but also a lack of creative thinking of how to solve their problems. This is a challenge for me to put their problems into context through a causal loop diagram.

The creation of the casual loop diagram was our first effort at integrating and applying learning to this situation. The diagram framed the problem in a compelling way, allowing for deeper insight and broader understanding of the complexities of the problem. This assists us in understanding the root causes for this situation. The key drivers for this problem are :

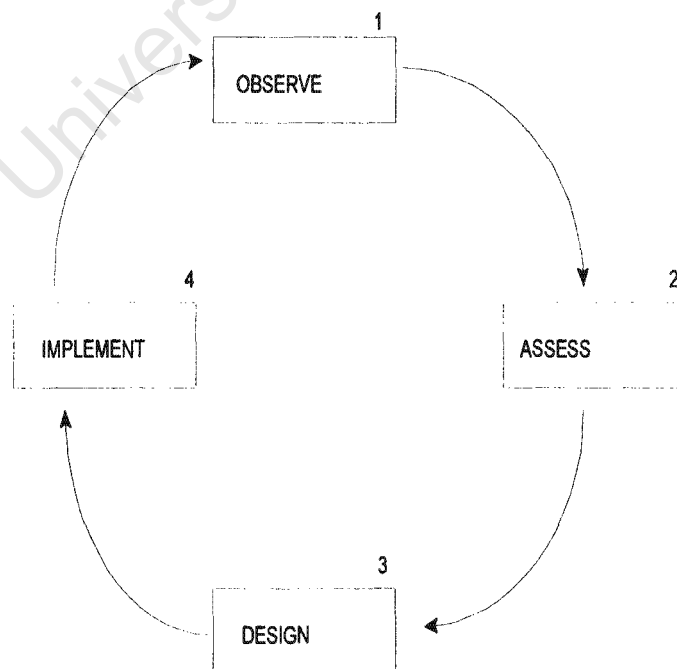
- a lack of knowledge about creating a better process;
- a lack of policy with regards to staff enquiries;

- the staff line departments responsible for time sheets, leave records and enquiries in this regard are not performing this function adequately;
- a lack of internal capacity with regards to the reconciliations of attendance registers with leave records;
- line management does not fulfill their responsibilities in terms of managing their staff, specifically relating to leave and sick leave;
- Human Resources records are not up to date;
- staff require training with regards to properly understanding the Payday system;
- a lack of shared vision regarding my expectations and strategy.

The above drivers were identified as the major causes for creating crisis management within the Personnel Administration section. I, however, decided not to take ownership of this project, but to leave it to the team to determine to what extent they are committed to changing the current situation. I would also like to determine to what extent **"consistent directed effort impacts on achieving permanent change."**

PHASE 2

Reflecting back on my interviews with my staff - testing against my initial observation of the salient features of the situation.



The following issues emerged from my critical reflection:

- How do I consistently reflect on my own managerial practice? In other words, how do I enhance my personal as well as interpersonal insights?
- What elements should be present in order for a system to be a healthy system?
- How do I improve the interplay between my staff's autonomous actions and their role as observers of these actions? How to improve my management of the interaction, interconnection and interrelationships within Human Resources and its environment?
- How do I structure the functions of my department in order to ensure collaborative leadership and enhance "community building" for planning, sharing and reflecting on results? In other words, to enhance effective partnering relationships?
- How do I draw links between subunits and results and put problems in context so that it assists my staff in being more effective with their actions?
- How to create a shared understanding of the need for collaboration, communication and critical reflection?

Notes : Workshop : Employment Equity Act : 30-31 March 1999

The following key issues were noted during this two-day workshop:

- Our effort to implement affirmative action speaks for itself.
- Does the Employment Equity Act bring something else into the arena?
- What about performance management?
- What is the critical success factor for a sustainable development system within the organisation?
- Why should affirmative action be an issue?
- What do we do about the development and promotion of our internal staff? Are there any workforce, succession and career plans?

- What are the key competencies management should possess to ensure sound people development?
- Need a workforce transition plan - we have to enable/empower staff to move/migrate from current processes and structures to the redesigned processes and structures in a manner that ensures sustainability of change.
- What are the critical success factors for such a plan?

Question :

What is the impact of a lack of an integrated management approach to people management on business performance?

Question :

To what extent does sharing power and involvement in decision making contribute to sustainable performance?

Criteria for involvement

- Time available to make a decision;
- The understanding and support which will be required to carry out the decision;
- Knowledge and expertise required to make the decision.

Question :

How do you build constructive relationships with your staff?

Question :

How do you develop mutual accountability for your developmental goals?

Question :

To what extent do relationships within your department contribute to adding knowledge?

Interaction is important. Through conversations people deepen their understanding of what is really going on in the organisation, with their customers and their colleagues. In order to adapt to its ever-changing environment, people in the organisation have to learn. One of the primary ways that knowledge workers learn is through their interactions with one another - perhaps the most important work in the new economy is creating conversation.

Question :

What do we do to increase our chances of achieving sustainability in people development? My role as Human Resources Manager is to assist line management in re-framing how they think about the development of their staff?

Flowing from the interviews and the key themes which have emerged, I was considering the issues of "building a learning organisation" which has gained currency in management circles. The real challenge here was collective learning, and through this process of collective learning to improve organisational performance. Issues which have to be considered in the way forward are, for example, the challenge to provide value and to challenge my staff to rise above their conventional blinders in order to add new ways of thinking and new forms of behaviours to their repertoire. To really make sense of this learning effort, my staff and I needed to see through the various perspectives so that we could come to terms with the situation based on actual data, and make sense of it in a way that was credible to us. We need to reflect on our progress collaboratively, talk about it effectively, consider its implications and communicate its "learning" to others. To instill organisational learning requires a deliberate attempt to institutionalize reflection.

I realised that I, as the manager, through my managerial practice, am enhancing and encouraging my staff to work in their functional units, but also that I cannot change it myself. I need to change my thinking and behaviour in order to bring about the necessary changes in their practices.

The first question which I asked myself in this situation was:

What are the core elements which have to be present in order for a system to be known as healthy?

Systemic health can only be understood as a combination of four factors, each of which must be present to some degree. These four factors are :

- a) a sense of identity, purpose or mission;
- b) a capacity on the part of the system to adapt and maintain itself in the face of internal and external changes;
- c) a capacity to perceive and test reality; and
- d) some degree of internal integration or alignment of the subsystems that make up the total system.

A system is, first of all, a way of looking at the world. It is a mental construction of a whole, for which it is possible to establish a set of interrelated parts that make up the perceived whole. The system - its identity parts and relationships - cannot be

anything else but a construction or distinction by an observer; and different observers in different contexts with different purposes make different distinctions. In this sense, defining a system is viewpoint-dependent. In everyday language we talk about the health, legal and education systems making perceived wholes in the real world. My question, therefore, is how do my staff and I construct the Human Resources Department as a system? Is there a shared construction of this system? A well-grounded construction must help us in coordinating our actions.

PHASE 3

Intervention

Purpose : To assess the current construction that my staff have individually of the Human Resources Department as a system.

How : I requested that my staff provide me with written comments on the following questions.

1. What is the common focus of this department?
2. What is the purpose of your specific function? Rethink how your functions are a means to an end - what end?
3. What are the interrelationships and the functional interdependencies of your specific function with that of the other functions within the Human Resources Department?
4. How can you link your functions more clearly to the other functions within the Human Resources Department?

The comments of the different practitioners within this department are attached as **ER ANNEXURE "1"**.

Assessment of comments

- There are different perceptions with regards to the purpose or mission of the Human Resources Department.
- The link between individual functions and that of Human Resources as a system is not always clear.
- There is a good understanding of how the different functions should interrelate, but in practice this does not happen - why is this the situation? A very good example of this is the process of recruitment and selection, personnel

administration and organisation and work study.

As the manager of the Human Resources Department, it is my responsibility to ensure the effectiveness of all processes within the Human Resources Department. I have to encourage work practices which will ensure an integrated approach to managing the issues with which Human Resources is involved. The following was recorded after a meeting with Senior Management (11.4.99)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A skilled, knowledgeable coach is an important factor.• Cross-functional teamwork without a coordinator is difficult to evolve naturally. | <p>When we ask for information with regards to the amount of staff in our employ, we get different answers from Finance and Human Resources. We do not know what the correct figure is. Finance claims that we have 1 350 and Human Resources maintains the figure is 1 850.</p> |
|--|--|

A thorough analysis of this situation brought forth the following insights :

- There is a different perception between the Finance Department and Human Resources with regards to what is meant by the concept of staff establishment.
- There is no interaction between personnel administration and recruitment and selection with regards to communication when a post is being filled, and the process which has to be followed. Therefore there are always differences in statistics.
- Inaccurate information with regards to post level and salary scale is being given to the personnel administration section.

Further to this, I also established that no input with regards to possible development areas of new appointees is being fed into the training and development section.

Three issues emerged from this :

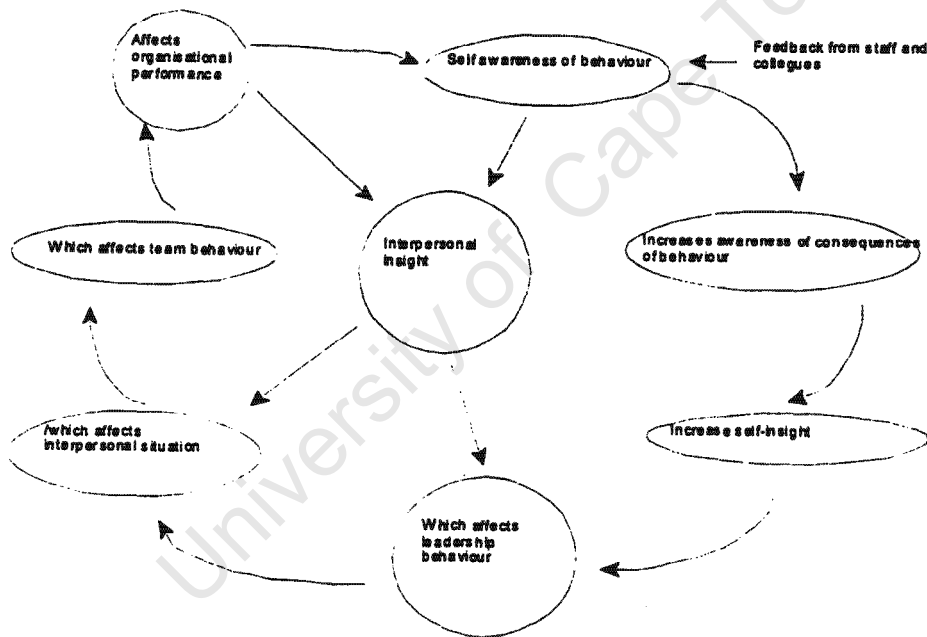
- we need reorganisation of work;
- the task of developing cross-functional teams was a significant challenge for me;
- effective partnering relationships are a prerequisite for effective teamwork as this leads to effective organisation within a team.

Intervention

To enhance my managerial self-awareness

It is pivotal that a leader/manager critically reflects on his/her managerial effectiveness, but specifically with regards to his/her quality of interaction with his/her staff and peers. Part of improving my practice involves reflecting on the quality of my interactions with my staff. Self-awareness on one's behaviour is vital for improving managerial practice. Self-awareness has two components, namely self insight and interpersonal insight. Interpersonal insight relates to how well you know others with whom you interact.

Casual Loop Diagram to Improve Managerial Self Awareness



PHASE 4

Intervention

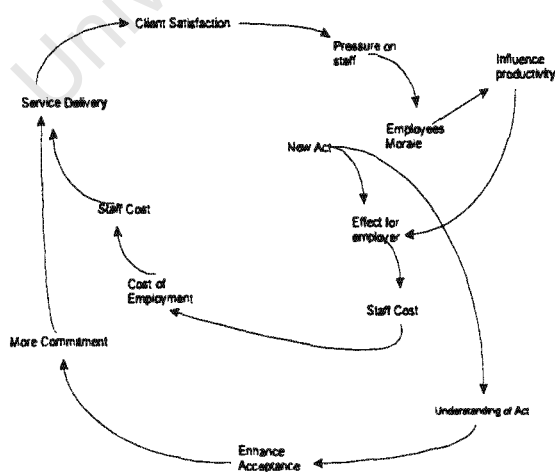
The *Viable Systems Model (VSM)* is an organisational design model which is based on cybernetic principles. In this model, because control is a key concern, it is based on the neuro-cybernetic processes of the human brain and nervous system, which it sees as a tried and tested system. The intervention is that, through this model,

as a tried and tested system. The intervention is that, through this model, organisations can be ideally organised to achieve efficient and effective realisation of set goals whilst maintaining the ability to adapt to changes in the environment. Control is spread throughout the design of the *Viable Systems Model* which enhances self-organisation and localizes management of problems, and there is an emphasis on the relationship between the system and its environment. Due to the control problems, specifically with regards to cross-functional coordination, the group decided to workshop the applicability of the *VSM* for the Human Resources System.

Implementation

The group had agreed to implement the *VSM* specifically to improve self-organisation of the teams and to improve their cross-functional interaction. Through this process, the team’s purpose was to improve their managerial self-awareness. This awareness develops mainly through some type of feedback as the individuals interact with others and their individual actions influence the team’s performance. Two variables which influence team performance are the aspects of self-insight - how completely and accurately one knows oneself; and interpersonal insight - how well one knows others with whom you interact. A key in building constructive relationships is to develop an organisational culture that encourages information exchange.

On 27 May 1999, I had discussions with our Traffic Department with regards to the implementation of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and specifically how it affected their working arrangements. Their main concern related to their built-in overtime. The question that they put to me was how their existing Conditions of Service with regards to built-in overtime would be affected by the new Act. During our discussions, the real issue or concern of the traffic staff was that they had become accustomed to the salary which they earned due to the overtime and should their overtime be decreased, some financial constraints would be caused for them.



28.5.99

The unions requested to see me with regards to our selection process. We (unions) have a problem in so far as that Human Resources does not adhere to our agreements. We had an understanding that the two project leaders for the selection process of the unions as well as their secretaries would each receive a schedule of the interview dates but that Andre Kermis (personnel officer responsible for selection and recruitment) has instructed his clerk not to send this schedule to the so-called project leaders. The result of this is that they are now informed late of the selection interviews and are unable to inform their shop stewards of the interviews in time. The effect of this is that a shop steward is informed late that he or she has to attend an interview and then has to ask their supervisor for permission to attend the interview. The latter causes friction between the shop steward and his supervisor. The result for Human Resources is that we now have to intervene and solve the conflict. The real problem is that I, as Human Resources Manager, have to intervene and handle the conflict resolution. Line management also complains that shop stewards come and go as they wish and that there is no control over them. The short notice that they get for requests for the shop stewards to attend interviews is creating problems. Certain shop stewards are not available for their work anymore as they are constantly busy with union business.

Further to this is the issue of transport.

Question : Why do we have a shop steward per constituency and why are they not attending the interviews per department? Why do only one or two shop stewards per union attend interviews?

Why does my staff not question the role of the shop steward per constituency?

Why did they not interact with the labour relations officer with regard to this issue?

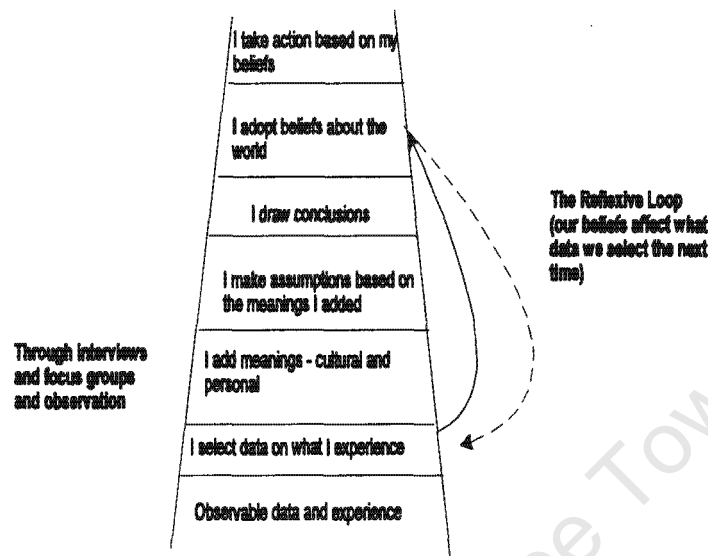
It was clear to me that there was no improvement in the interaction, inter connectivity and interrelationship between the different functional units in my department. This specifically relates to recruitment and selection, organisation and work study, personnel administration and training and development.

Cross-functional collaboration without a coordinator is difficult to evolve naturally.

How can I create or improve the integrated process for continual improvement?

I decided to have interviews with three focus groups, being the Unions, Management and a selection of successful appointees and unsuccessful candidates with regards to the selection and recruitment process. The results of these interviews are attached as **ER ANNEXURE "2"**.

Using the ladder of inference, I reflected back on this situation.



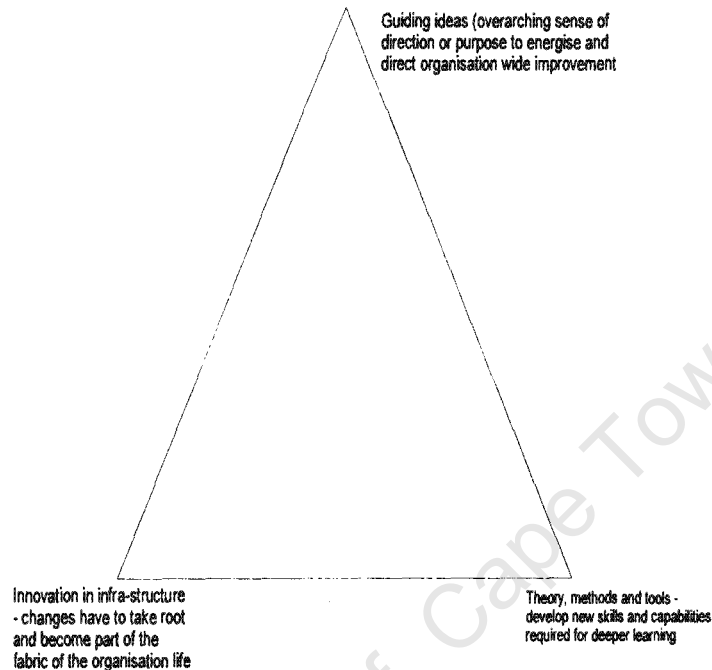
Efforts and methods for improvement in the process of recruitment and selection are still fragmented with no overall competent guidance.

What is the role of my leadership in this learning and change process? Do I provide the necessary competent guidance?

Planning is a very important process of learning and change - it is also a way for the developing of an integrated system for continual improvement as learning is integrated to planning and planning to management.

How can I develop the capabilities of systems thinking and collaborative enquiry?

Architecture of a Learning Organisation



An important vehicle in my department is to promote more dialogue between the different S1-operational units to establish a new cycle of learning that connects practice and performance.

I requested that Janine ask Bill, Andre, Koos and Tracey for their inputs for the Mayoral Report. These inputs were supposed to be finalised before 25.5.99. The response that I got from Bill, Andre and Koos were that they had no input to add. Nothing was discussed with me beforehand. Tracey undertook to write her part over the weekend. I was really disappointed with the reaction and reflected back on my instruction.

The situation brought me back to the aspect of face to face relationships, the quality of our conversations and their understanding of my instructions.

Question : To what extent is building effective relationships being influenced by face to face relationships?

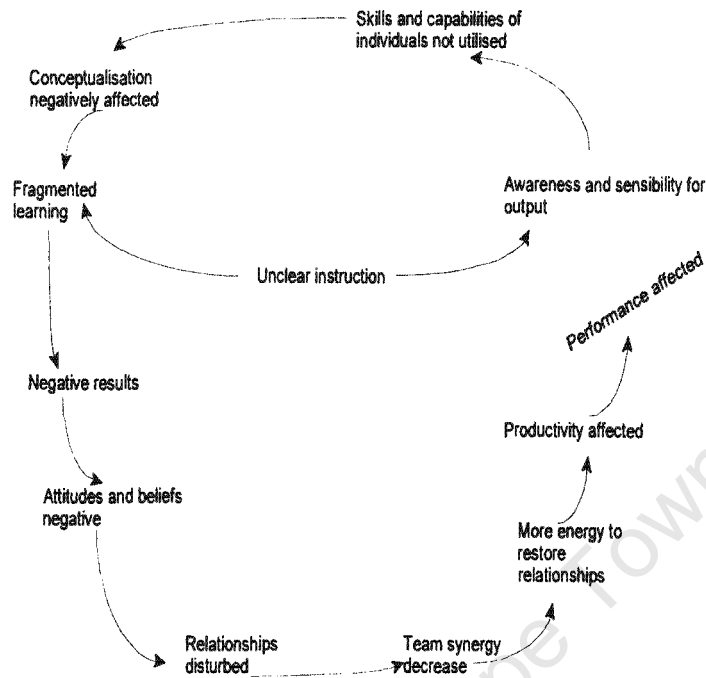
Gartlett and Bartlett (1997:7) say that the talents of our people are greatly underestimated and their skills are underutilised. Our biggest challenge is to fundamentally redefine our relationships with our employees. The objective is to build a place where people have the freedom to be creative and where they feel a real sense of accomplishment - a place that brings out the best in everybody.

Questions

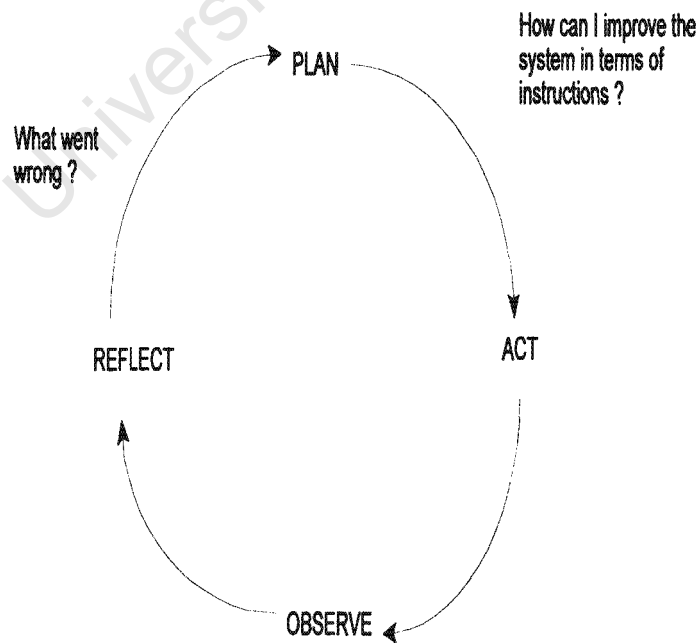
1. How can I succeed in capturing the energy, imagination and commitment of my staff in what they are doing?
2. Are my staff capable of adapting to the demands being placed on them by the organisation?
3. Transformation within Human Resources. What corporate model is emerging? What is happening? Why is it happening? How are we going to implement it?
4. How does the ability to inspire individual creativity and initiative affect relationship management?
5. How does trust influence relationship management?
6. How can planning as a learning infrastructure be used to build an integrative process of organisational learning and a learning organisation?
7. Why do some of my staff not succeed in thinking outside their "boxes"?

Relating back to face to face relationships

- What forces or underlying structure compel some of my staff to act as they had done and still do?
- What were their mental models of what I required from them (as it was clear that their mental models and my mental model were not in alignment)?
- What can I do to prevent such behaviour/ responses in the future?



The Wheel of Learning



Plan : How can I improve the understanding of my staff with regards to my instruction?

How : How can I improve this aspect of my managerial practice?

Observe problems :

- Poor instruction;
- Lack of understanding;
- Lack of commitment;
- Uncoordinated actions;

PHASE 5

Intervention

Objective :

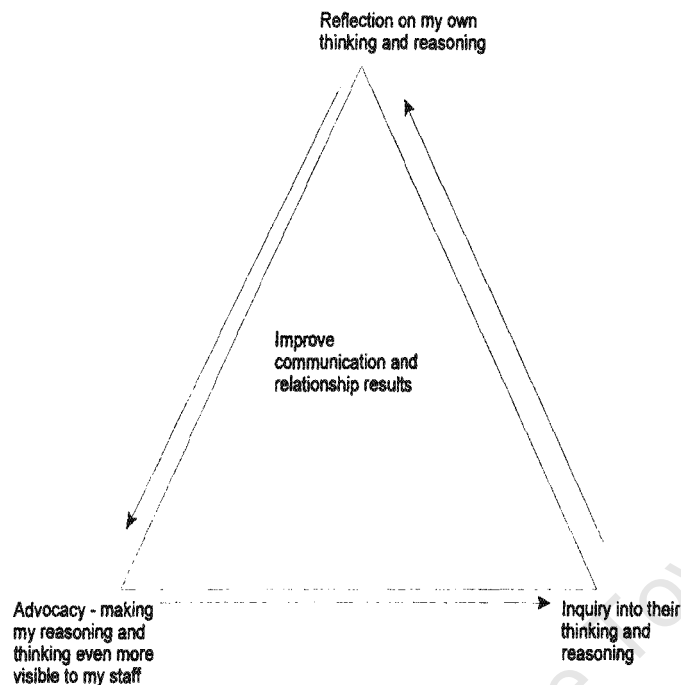
To improve the understanding of my instructions amongst my staff through improving their reflective thinking and enquiry skills.

Why ? :

It is a given fact that a gap exists between some of my staffs' hearing what I say and what my expectations are. They only "see" their interpretation and I only "see" mine. To a certain degree one can say that there is a difference between their mental models of my instruction and that of my own. This leads to frustration, conflict and tension between myself and my staff. It is, therefore, important that we learn to reflect, enquire and make our assumptions and understanding more explicit.

How can I improve the quality of my communication?

I decided to make use of the *Ladder of Inference* through the following:



The purpose is to make thinking processes more visible, to see the differences are in our perceptions and that which we have in common.

31.5.99

At our budget meeting it became evident that the organisation is not aligned in its purpose and direction. It specifically relates to what our core business is and what we need to support the core business. One central issue which emerged strongly, was the aspect of the real cost of our staff. Further to this issue was the lack of constructive partnering relationships to ensure that we constructively cut back on our expenses as has been requested by the Chief Executive Officer.

At a Human Resources Working Group meeting held on the same day, an issue which has emerged is that of the implementation of legislation such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. It was specifically related to a conceptual framework to unify the actions on a metro-wide basis. There is a lack of integration and consistency across organisations due to a lack of common purpose, strategy and understanding. How do I as the Human Resources Manager assist the organisation with integration in order to reach our goals of improvement?

1.6.99

The central theme of any legislation is that it involves some degree of change. It will somehow affect the employer and the employee, and this has the inherent potential for disturbing the relationship that exists between the two parties. The Human Resources Department fulfills a central role in this process of implementing legislation which impacts on the Human Resources of the organisation. Two central concepts that link to the implementation, as with my other change process, are the elements of effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness is doing the right thing, while efficiency is doing things correctly. The question that I ask myself during the implementation of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act in the Fire Brigade Department is : How effective and efficient was Human Resources in the facilitation of this process? To what extent did we use this opportunity to improve the performance of the Fire Brigade Department? The following issues concerned me :

- We are reactive;
- We did not utilise the opportunities which the Act provided for us, for example, the rationalisation of the fire brigade service - effective organisational review process;
- Our managing of the partnering relationships was not effective;
- We did not use planning as a learning infra-structure;
- The lack of timeous data/information;
- What is the real impact of the "adjustment" on the organisation?;
- Lack of a consistent driver for the process.

How can we successfully make enduring changes in our mindsets?

Einstein : *" We cannot expect to solve a complex problem using the same mindset that we used to create it in the first place."*

2.6.99

How to improve the management of both internal and external organisational changes?

The role of structural dialogue and other inquiry methods as a means to generate a new collective mindset to enhance the effectiveness of transformation. How to generate new knowledge and new thinking? Change management as a field of enquiry, research and practice is one methodology to generate new knowledge and new thinking. Change management is the process of aligning an organisation's people and culture with changes in business strategy, structure and system. Its aim is to help

achieve organisational effectiveness by congruence of people, processes, structures and culture.

Question : To what extent should Human Resources manage legislation changes as change and change management can be a discipline for practice of change focused on the external environment and the need for strategic change?

The underlying theory and analytical framework of change management is primarily based in strategy and strategic change and a congruence model for alignment of people, processes, structures and culture. Its underlying values and assumptions are the organisation's survival and viability, while organisational competitiveness is the primary concern. It is also action orientated (change behaviours before attitudes).

Potential problem : Change management is externally focused while all changes affect people in one or another way. How do we sustain humanism and democracy in the organisation and maintain the organisation's focus on human growth and potential within organisational settings? How does organisational development link with change management?

The underlying values and assumptions of organisational development are the growth and development of the individual, and that the organisation consists of a network of relationships and does not exist apart from persons constituting them. It is also normative - reductive (change attitudes in order to change behaviour). Relationship and community building is important.

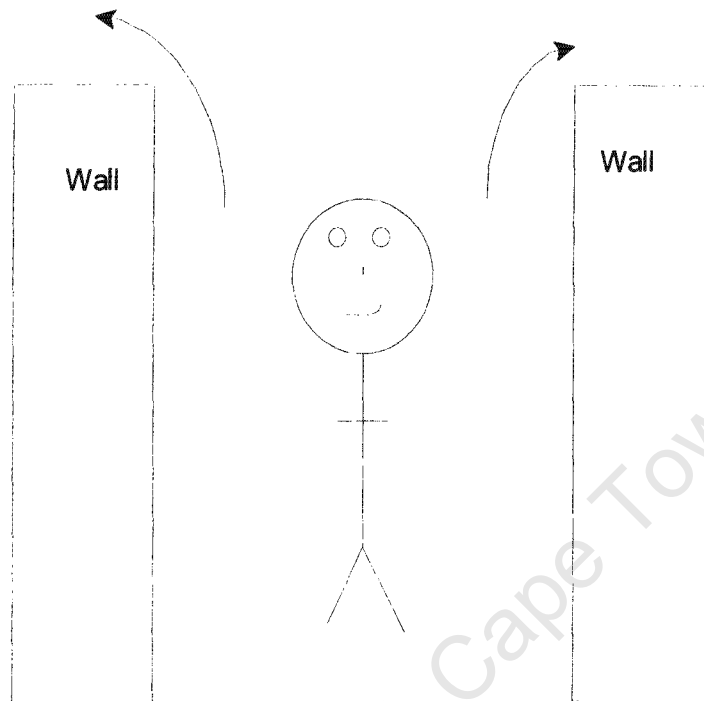
What tools are available for developing shared partnerships?

How can we purposefully engage people in the change processes in the organisation?

- ☐ Wrestling with the role I play and the role of understanding myself and how it impacts on my ability to guide the process. It is imperative to work on forming a community if we are to survive. Organisations are shifting, they need partnerships between individuals and the organisation.
- ☐ How can we continually make our staff more aware of the context in which they are working as well as the complexity and interrelationships continually?
- ☐ How do we keep change focused and our practice integrated while responding to such diverse needs without becoming reactive or fragmented through time?
- ☐ How do I get the organisation to approach things holistically?

- How does Human Resources assist any organisation in breaking old frameworks and re-conceptualising them?

Drawing a picture of how I feel at 15:40 on 2.6.99.



What could I do to see over the wall? How could I get out of this confusion? What is the phenomenon emerging from my data and observations?

Organisations are complex and systemically interconnected, and it requires cooperation and teamwork to increase its effectiveness. How do effective partnering relationships influence learning organisations, specifically transformational learning?

How can one ensure a learning organisation, which is in itself a complex beast, consisting of many systems and processes, whose separate learning and change efforts must be coordinated and integrated? Why do so many change efforts fail? Schein says that learning and change are interconnected concepts.

3.6.99

Learning to plan and planning to learn. What mechanisms will assist in helping the organisation to think in a more integrative way with respect to the health of the systems in which they function? Schein (1999 pg 12) says that it is time to accept the reality of this complexity and stop over-simplifying systemic learning processes by touting particular remedies like leadership, vision, reengineering, total quality, customer focus, systems thinking and the like. Ultimately, what is new in this field is the

recognition that transformational learning will require patient and careful research before we can advocate any particular learning mechanism of how to achieve it.

Unions approach me with the following issue :

That all interviews and short listings now have to be conducted in Milnerton. There was previously an understanding that, in order to ensure that all shop stewards are involved in the process and specifically in their constituencies, short listing and interviews would be held at a place as close as possible to where the successful candidate would be working. Human Resources changed this and it created problems.

This unilateral changing of our agreement impacts negatively on our partnering relationship. My question is why did this happen? Is the availability of the venues the only problem?

4.6.99

At our Local Bargaining Council it became obvious that one of our unions (IMATU) was out on a point scoring exercise. This is detrimental to the relationship and can also result in a win-lose situation. Employment-related disputes/differences are painful and difficult because they deal in the most fundamental way with people's working lives, hopes and dreams. Often this conflict is the tip of a bad-relationship iceberg, and the grievance or legal action is the symptom, not the cause. How can the quality of the relationship be fixed, not the legal consequences of it, in order to free up and release the parties from their conflict spiral so that they can regain control of themselves and their interactions?

Question : How can we improve this relationship and quality of our interactions? Are there any relationship-restructuring mechanisms/programs available to assist me in building a sound and healthy partnering relationship with the unions?

Possible Interventions

1. Process improvement: How effective or efficient are the processes between the unions and Human Resources?
2. Teambuilding : Is it possible that Human Resources and the unions operate as a team? The fundamental requirements for effective teamwork are a common purpose and direction, as well as cohesiveness and cooperation to work together to achieve the desired purpose and objectives.

Process Consultation: How can we improve our process consultation with all relevant role players? Process consultation as an intervention focuses attention on how individuals or groups interact.

Interorganisational Development: An intervention in which two groups or organisations work together to establish and/or maintain more effective relationships.

Culture Transformation : An intervention designed to change assumptions about the "right" and the "wrong" ways of doing things.

The basis of all these possible interventions is to improve trust and collaboration between the relevant stakeholders in order to improve the quality of work life for all the people involved.

Step 1

What? Establish or agree on appropriate and achievable relationship goals to improve the functioning between the employer, representative union and employees.

How? Assess employment-connected relationships systemically.

Why? To identify sources of disruption, differences, disagreements or disputes - relationship audit.

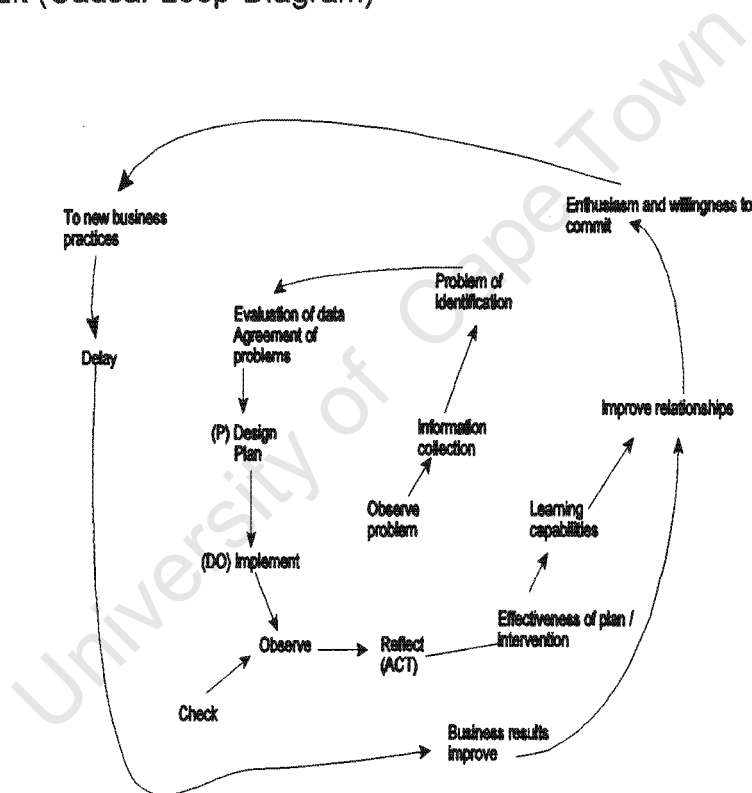
Step 2

What? Evaluate the effects of such conflicts against appropriate relationship goals.

How? Using the Affinity Diagram Forcefield Analysis Interrelationship Diagram

Why? To agree on the most appropriate interventions.

Relationship Audit (Causal-Loop-Diagram)



7.6

During a meeting held with management with regard to the organisational rights of the unions, the following concerns were raised:

- what are the rights of a local shopsteward?
- how do we control our shopstewards?
- which shopsteward has to be present at interviews and shortlistings?
- are shopstewards allowed to represent or leave their workplace without authorisation?

What has emerged from this meeting is the aspect of operational domain vis the observed domains. It is clear that the situational complexity is increasing due to conflict between the operational domain of management and the unions perceived observation of their role in this operational domain.

Effective partnering relationships are influenced by :

- operational domain
- informational domain
- managerial self-awareness
- interpersonal insight
- team member exchange - members' working relationship with other team members. Three main elements - mutual trust, respect and obligation.

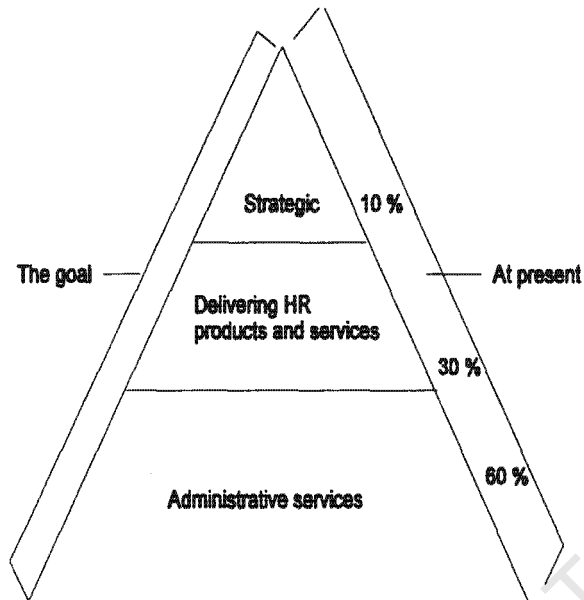
During my meeting with my own staff members held this morning, I could still observe signals of not really understanding the importance of critical reflection, what and how they perform their job. There are still strong signals of waiting for me to take the initiative. The aspect of collaboration and teamwork is also still lacking.

Going through my staff's monthly reports, I did not notice any visible interfunctional meetings or coordination. I am still concerned about our value-added role in the organisation, and specifically the extent to which we develop the people management skills of our line managers.

Key issues for me:

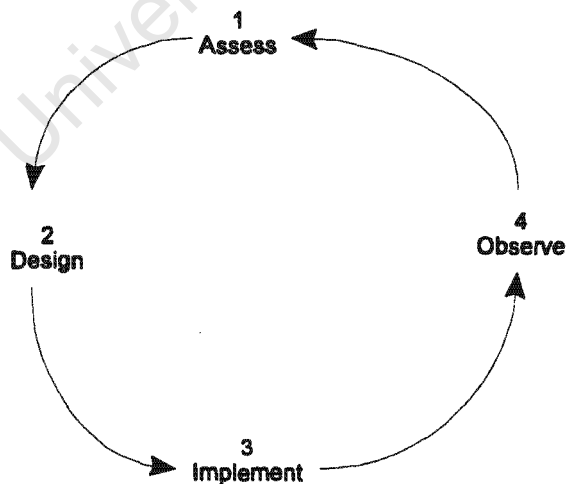
- creating a culture of continuous improvement;
- effective participation in joint problem solving;
- integrated people development strategy which links affirmative action, succession planning and skills development;
- our HR policies are not compatible with best practices;
- how can we become real change makers?

Human Resources Roles



10.6

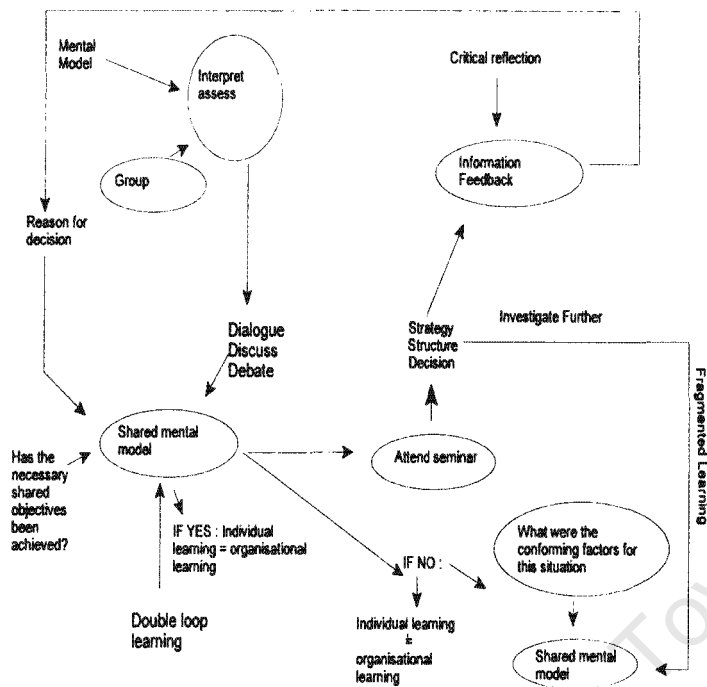
At the beginning of the day I had an informal conversation with the Manager : Library Services regarding to a seminar that she, her Director and three of her colleagues had to attend . Their attitudes to attend the seminar were not positive. I entered into a discussion beginning with the following question: Why do you and your colleagues feel as you feel now? I then applied the OADI cycle as depicted hereunder:



During the assessment of the situation, the following issues emerged:

- The communication between the director and his four managers about this course was not at all good, and one manager was only informed, for example, the day before the seminar (and he already had authorisation for two days leave);
- The preparation regarding the necessity of attending the seminar was absent;
- There is a visible lack of trust and confidence between the relevant roleplayers;
- It emphasises the fact that the process of individual learning is embedded in a larger feedback process whereby individual learning interacts with individual mental models;
- There was no shared mental model of the learning or experience the director has desired them to go through. In other words, there was a clash in the mental models of the director with that of his four managers;
- The data we, as individuals, see and how we made sense of our observation, is conditioned by in cognitive frames - the action we take is shaped by our internalised routines.
- Working in teams requires that participants have to make explicit the reasoning behind their decisions, the mental models driving their decision-making. The reason behind the decision is the basis in forming shared mental models.

The following model was designed to improve the situation :



When there is a change in the mental model, there is a more complex process which is termed second-order or double loop learning.

Shared mental models can only change if individual mental models change. Individual mental models are strongly influenced by shared models. Individuals with the assumption and behavior that are at odds with their larger social milieu experience pressure to conform.

In organisational settings, individual actions are distinct from organisational action. Both actions, however, are influenced by mental models. Individual mental models shape individual actions through individual learning. In addition, organisational actions are directly influenced by shared mental models, such as standard operating procedures and operating policies. Like individual models, shared mental models and operating policies may be tacit and unrecognised, even by people whose actions are influenced by them. Both individual and organisational action may lead to an environmental response.

11.06.99

I read the article of "The Learning Initiative at Mightly Motors Inc". This organisation had utilised Peter Senge 's five disciplines of a learning organisation - personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision and systems thinking as a basis for their learning initiative. Their executives had learned how to use causal loop diagrams, a system dynamics mapping tool that allows people to discuss relationships among imported elements of a system in their product development system which was labeled LEW - a product development system which produces products that were "late, expensive and wrong". What was forthcoming from this learning experience is the following:

1. They can be successful with the right people, skills, attitude and resources.
2. It takes consistent directed effort to achieve permanent change.
3. Solutions without a basis in the process or system do not work.
4. Planning is a key to a successful learning organisation.
5. Their reward system promotes/allows poor planning.
6. They underestimate the effort required to make a change.
7. Focus on deadlines influences the problem solving process.
8. They waste time in correcting things not done right the first time.
9. Random small problems becomes crises.
10. We are forcing change without understanding the system, the magnitude of the change or the implication of the change on the system.

This last factor relating to change brings me back to the aspect of change and learning. I specifically took two of the following learning points of some of the readings I had perused.

1. Espejo, Raul: What is system thinking? His theory of action in organisation makes visible the interplay between people's autonomous action and their role as observers of these actions. All change is individualised. People make distinctions based on their experience, and these distinctions define our individual complexity and also our situational complexity as we ground them in shared objectives, directions or tasks. In a change process, it is of the utmost importance that these interactions are managed with the necessary direction and

purpose for the change to be effective. Change therefore affects the operational domain of the individual. The change triggers certain actions which leads to individual distinction, which in turn influenced positively or negatively individuals' interaction as they negotiate and re-negotiate the distinctions they made of the influence of all change in their operational domain. These interactions lead to certain relationship structuring, behavior and actions. It is this relationship, specifically the quality thereof, which will define the structure of the change process.

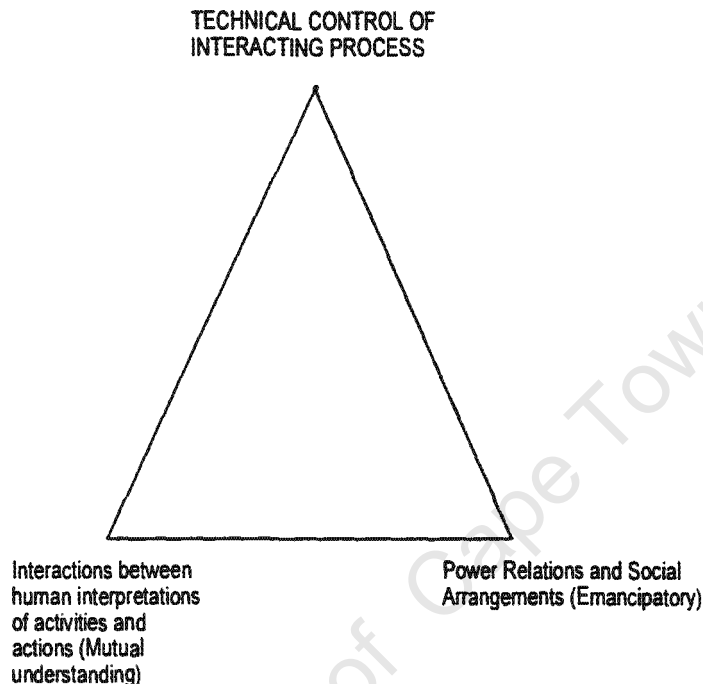
Recognising the difference between the distinctions we make about our moment-to-moment interaction in our operational domain - the domain of our autonomy - and the distinctions we make about others' operational domain in observers, is of crucial importance in the change process. The observance mode is crucial to effective communication. There is nothing more to the world for each of us than the distinctions we are able to make. This is our reality: the complexity arises from their "bumpings" in an operational domain - the complexity emerging from the moment-to-moment interaction/contributions in the autonomy mode which has to be taken into account for effective participation in change processes.

Organisations are constituted as closed networks of interactions in the operational domain of people. This gives the organisation its identity. Change in the identity is the outcome of a closed network of multiple adjustments taking place among the participants in their operational domain as they adjust to each other's positions in response to external perturbation. Change is determined by the informal coherence of the structure, not by information about external events. Change may be triggered by information but not determined by it. Therefore it is misleading to say that organisations are responding to external information, as this is construed in common language. The view may be useful in the informational domain of the observer, but in the operational domain participants are adjusting their stability vis-à-vis each other as a result of environmental perturbation.

2. Operational domain is influenced by communication in the form of dialogue which is dominated by social constraints and power relations. These social constraints and power relations, therefore, are built in the structure of the capacity of the organisation to deal with change. The interrelation between human interpretation of actions and activities within the change process influence is either positive or negative for the possibility of the mutual understanding for the need for change. Support for change will depend on how the people responsible for managing the change manage the social constraints and more specifically the power relations, within the change process. Power affects people's actions and interpretations. The exercise of power influences the social arrangements within the change process. Therefore, an analysis of the power relations helps to identify/highlight the forces that will prevent or

enhance open and free participation in the change process. This power relation is also called the emancipatory variable.

3. A System's View to change. For change to be effective, it has to be implemented as a total system intervention.



A total system intervention is essentially a process that enables the problem solver to employ a range of methods by first thinking creatively about the issue an organisation faces, and then by choosing a method or methods most likely to solve those issues effectively. Change is usually implemented to solve a specific problem in the organisation. Problem solving means managing the management of a set of interacting issues. These issues are categorised as follows:

- Human interests which arise from the interaction of human and technical activities, being:
 - ⇒ technical control of interrelating processes;
 - ⇒ mutual understanding - the interrelating between human interpretations of activities and actions;

⇒ power relations and social arrangements (emancipatory).

- how the above is controlled
- interaction of the organisation with its environment
- organisation purpose and direction, and its members' interpretation of all of these.

Change is, therefore, a particular type of human activity that is by definition part of the interacting activities. Change should then be understood as a set of interacting issues and problem solving, or intervention - a part of a continuous process of managing these issues.

The four principles underlying the total system intervention philosophy are:

- systemic
 - achieving participation
 - being reflective
 - striving for emancipation
4. Information is not enough to understand the complexity of change processes - what organisations receive from their environment are perturbations that are absorbed in different ways to be different structures. To a large degree, it is the content of the message that determines the expense, but the structure that absorbs the message i.e. the structural capacity of the organisations.
 5. Both change and learning are highly dynamic and individualised processes.
 6. For change to be effective, business and human processes need to be integrated if lasting results are to be achieved.
 7. Change is fundamentally a cognitive activity - i.e. it is an activity of interpreting, understanding and making sense.
 8. Change has to take cognisance of the dynamics of the learning organisation and the role of culture in these dynamics.
 9. Change has an impact on the systems health of the organisation. Systemic health can only be understood as a combination of four factors, each which must be present to some degree being:
 - 9.1 a sense of identity, purpose or mission;

- 9.2 a capacity, on the part of the system, to adapt and maintain itself in the face of internal and external changes;
- 9.3 a capacity to perceive and test reality; and
- 9.4 some degree of internal integration or alignment of the sub-systems that make up the total systems.

14.6.99

Read through various articles relating to “a learning organisation”

Discussing the implementation of the Employment Equity Act within the organisation. It is clear to me that the EEA is part of transforming our workplace and the following questions arise from this discussion:

- How can HR ensure the sustainability of this transformation process?
- How can the rest of the organisation benefit from this experience?
- What do our efforts, to date, reveal about our opportunities for success and our potential for failure?

KEY QUESTION

How can HR become a real agent of continuous transformation, shaping processes and a culture that together improve an organisations capacity to manage sustainable change?

17.6.99

Conflict with a union (SAMWU) with regards to selection interviews. Cause of conflict is the double booking of a certain shopsteward. I called all the roleplayers together on it and the following issues emerged :

- ◇ Interview schedule - it is sent to the union but there is no feedback. It appears that there is a perception that HR is inflexible with regard to the schedule. Agree on two working days for input from the unions.
- ◇ Training of shopstewards - still expectation for further training in selection process.
- ◇ Selection policy has to be finalised as a matter of urgency.

Operational Domain - Conflict between these Domains still continuous.

18.6.99

Transformation - Reflecting Back

In my efforts to improve the management of the interrelationship and interfunctional collaboration of my staff through the implementation of the *Viable System Method of Stafford Beer*, the following emerges:

- My staff and I are going through a learning and change process.
- Assessment is vital for the participants in this learning effort.
- It will require an extraordinary effort from me, as the leader of the team, to assist my staff to rise above their conventional blinders to add new ways of thinking and new forms of behavior to their repertoire.
- I need to develop a feedback process that can provide guidance and support to my staff - critical reflection on their experience and understanding.

- My leadership through this transformation process is pivotal.
- Transformational learning is an integral part of this collaborative learning experience.
- It is imperative that my staff and I become aware of our own learning and change efforts as we are supposed to be the agents of transformation in the organisation.
- The successful transformation of this learning experience will require that I be continually aware of the underlying assumptions and reasoning that lead to my staff's actions. In this way, the unwritten, but powerful, tacit knowledge and undiscussable myths are brought to the surface, codified and turned into a knowledge base.
- We need to create a context for continuous conversation to support our learning - generating action through reflective conversation.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are our "noticeable results" to date ?
 - Yardstick of performance.
 - Assessment of events and team activity.
 - What evidence do we have that something noteworthy happened, for example, reflection became a practice?
 - an understanding of the value of reflecting and developing a capacity for reflecting on action.
 - communication was strengthened: governing values of the department were articulated and used in making decisions related to project activities.
 - systems thinking was incorporated into problem solving. Tools such as causal loop diagrams and systems dynamics modeling are used to examine complex problems from a multiple perspective and to consider the possibilities of longer term consequences.
 - teamwork improved.
- ◁ How to integrate programme management and training together, so that all work involves system thinking and collaboration?
- ◁ How to bridge the barriers between functions?
- ◁ Organisational learning is a process of collective sense-making - you don't just

produce results, you produce a "theory of how you got there".

- ◇ My ability to create results depends of my capability to navigate the team past the stumbling blocks of "control management" and the "functional hierarchies".
- ◇ How to create "actionable knowledge" - knowledge that covers generally tacit issues such as relationships and working habits that are brought to the surface, examined collaboratively and communicated.

21.6.99

Feedback on progress with our project with regard to the improvement of interrelationships and inter-functional coordination and collaboration.

Understanding of new concepts, possible radical concepts takes time.

Ongoing change in the HR environment required us to work together, and to work with more information, more complexity and more change - hence how critical is the leader's role in a change process?

We need a culture change in the Human Resources Department - this requires a skilled knowledgeable process coach.

The team was still dysfunctional - is it due to embedded behaviors, lack of commitment to change or lack of understanding?

I do have the feeling/impression that some of the team members are still scared and do not really understand the process.

The relationship between the team and the larger system must be carefully designed. This requires extra attention on the part of the leader of the team.

First staff member mentioned that we need a shared understanding of the concept of "autonomy" specifically in terms of priorities, resources and strategies.

Second staff member raised the necessity of a shared understanding of our identity/purpose - shared purpose for the Human Resources department.

Third staff member raised the necessity of understanding each function's specific role as well as that of other staff members in the department.

Fourth team member. It is clear that we are still working in a hierarchical way.

Myself. We need to change the way we were. We have to remove non-value added activities from our work. We have to justify the organisation's investment in its Human Resources department - therefore we have to add value to the organisation. We need to become visible agents of transformation. We need to develop the "human side" of the business and

How to build better conversation?
Specific attention has to be given to this aspect, managing the softer aspect of the team - the ways people think and communicate.

New types of behavior and attitudes can't just be decreed. They must be allowed to grow. People on the team must foster these themselves. Leaders must give their people room to experiment within the constraints necessary to deliver the change.

How to create conditions that promote learning for myself and my staff?

What is an appropriate balance between supporting the elements of an existing culture and changing the elements to create a new culture?

improve the people management skills in the organisation.

We need a new kind of relationship which fosters open communication, collaboration, teamwork and a participative approach to project leadership.

The "hey" principle is encouraging more in-depth conversations, across functional boundaries, in business related issues in a risk-free setting. The creation of partnerships require that functionally-based people are drawn together in ways that bridge the differences and focus on action with collaboration.

More attention has to be given to the "soft" side of the Human Resources Department and managing the flow of information amongst the Human Resources staff members.

Change in thinking, communication and behavior implies a culture change. What are the key elements of the existing culture and that of the vision culture? A culture change is essential for a high-performance and participatory department.

Any effective change process starts with "I". It is the most important and most difficult never-ending process. In my own case, I have to critically reflect on what must be successful and what not. I will have to re-evaluate and change. I believe in competence, knowing what to do, independence, strength of conviction and commitment to goals. Our biggest challenge comes from our lack of understanding others and our lack of tolerance and sensitivity to those whose needs are different from

ours. Organisations can only change if individual members change.

The task of developing teams is a significant challenge. What can I do so that teamwork can unlock the potential of the people in my department?

I want to improve processes and people through improving inter-functional work performance. I do understand that we have to break away from the traditional way of how we do things. To achieve high performance and prosperity, things need to be done differently.

What is necessary to promote higher performance in my HR projects?

Is it possible for people who have spent their lives thinking in a particular way to change their thinking?

Past experiences in developing new working ways are powerful influences in trying to create a better approach to business improvement.

In seeking a better process for coordination, collaboration and teamwork based on systems thinking and collaboration, efforts are focused on bridging the barriers between functions, creating a shared vision and cross-functional team work. The question is how do you get people to put them into practice?

We need a shared understanding of the systemic interrelationships of our work, and how to recreate our interrelationships with each other and with the rest of the organisation. All our projects, to a very high degree, require systems thinking and collaboration.

Our work cannot be understood in fragments, this is, however, how my staff are thinking, in a "reductionist thinking" way. This thinking is powerful and very pervasive.

The comments people asked about application led to their being critically challenged.

How can I make the "sense-making process visible"?

- Focus on what people did;
- how do they interpret events around them?;
- what reasoning led to their decision?;
- how they felt and what their contributions were.

22.6.99

It is clear to me that the decision support operational team does still not function efficiently. A lack of collaboration still exists. What is wrong, and why ?

Had a meeting with senior management on the aspects of contract posts. During our meeting it became clear that the management of our staff establishment is still a critical issue as conflicting information is still provided.

Organisational learning is a process of collective sense making. You don't just produce results, you produce a "theory of how you got there". It is essential to bring my staff together to work on Human Resources issues in an atmosphere of systemic understanding and dialogue because "we're all in it together, because we are all connected together".

Through critical reflection, conversation knowledge is being brought forth that helps the team learn and function more effectively. I need "actionable knowledge, i.e. knowledge that covers generally tacit issues such as relationships and work habits that are brought to surface, examined collaboratively and communicated. Such knowledge is part of the system which leads to success or failure - it provides the key for repeating successes and avoiding failure.

23.6.99

Had a discussion with the decision support operational unit and we designed a flow diagram of the process of how to manage the staff establishment.

24.6.99

Reflecting on my observation on the functionality of the employee relations, decision support and risk management units, it is clear to me that collaboration and teamwork is improving in the employee relations unit, but that there is still a lack of commitment from the decision support unit and specifically the risk management unit. This unit is to a very large extent dysfunctional.

I asked each functional group to develop a mission or purpose statement for Human Resources. I proposed this due to the belief that a shared image of the system would assist the staff in operating in a coordinated fashion.

Through the years we have built up a methodology of "reductionist thinking". This thinking is very powerful and pervasive and will take an extraordinary effort to be changed. People can say they understand but still not understand. Organisational learning does not mean letting go of analytical processes. It means complementing and supplementing them with synthesis or systems thinking. It is not such a clean thing "Just throw out all the traditional tools, my past life, and switch into new formulas." It means learning something in addition : the "and" not the "or".

Question : How can this organisation make use of systems thinking in a business context?

There is a need to create a climate within the team which will re-enforce more effective cross-functional communication and more responsibility for objectives. The better the team becomes at working together, the better it would deal with intricate components which cut across two or more functional roles.

Why can I not succeed in building a community of practice? How can I improve the collaboration between the S1-teams? What must I do to engage the team members in managing the team and setting the direction? How do I create new levels of collaboration and teamwork? We collectively reflect on this situation and it becomes quite clear that cross-functional collaboration needs new mental models for thinking. My staff are still thinking hierarchically and not in terms of processes. I have to fulfill a more active personal role in leading the cross-functional process.

I decided then to take action through the process of systems thinking, specifically the underlying values of the VSM. We also agreed to specifically analyse each situation asking the following:

What am I supposed to do?
 Why am I doing is?
 How am I going to do it?
 Who else in Human Resources
 also has an interest in this issue?

This is all about "how to re-frame my function".

It will take an extraordinary effort to change the mental model of reductionist thinking.

The equity officer who is located in the S1-staff development function provided me with the equity audit in regards to our staff compilation. Evaluating the figures I observed that her total figure for staff employed as at 30.6.99 was 1128. I know that we employ more or less 1480. I ask myself why was there such a big difference between her figure and that of the S1-operational team responsible for the staff establishment. During my enquiry it became clear that there was no cross-functional collaboration between these two S1-teams.

**ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
ANNEXURE "1"**

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES WITHING THE HUMAN RESOURCES FUNCTION

Employee Wellbeing

COMMON FOCUS FOR THE HUMAN RESOURCES GROUP

Human Resources needs to offer processes and tools to assist and support management and all employees in their comprehensive functioning within the organisation.

This needs to include the following goals:

The development, control and maintenance of systems to empower all employees to develop and grow within the organisation.

To develop all employees on a broad personal level in order to produce productive complete persons adding value to the organisation.

To allow all employees the opportunity to advance within the framework of a career plan in order to allow for a future within the organisation.

To encourage all employees to function as productive, responsible employees who are proud of themselves, the organisation for whom they work and the community which they serve.

To offer systems to assist management in effectively managing all employees both within the context of administrative systems and managerial interpersonal skills.

To promote equity and true democracy within the organisation

To reduce discrimination in all forms within the organisation

In order to achieve these goals, Human Resources needs to function as a team composed of interacting specialists who manage specific projects based on their specialisation, using internal (Human Resource) and external (organisational/ community) resources to achieve their goals.

The empowerment role of Human resources needs to address a number of levels.

On a micro level(within Human Resources) staff need to be empowered to work in a functional team. Team building is necessary within the whole staff, as is the increase and development of non-threatening communication style. A sense of unity and support of one another needs to be fostered to achieve a person friendly environment. The public image of Human Resources needs to be altered, from adversarial to customer friendly.

On a Macro and Environmental level, person friendly, efficient customer service oriented approaches need to be fostered and developed.

THE PURPOSE OF EWP FUNCTION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE BROADER HUMAN RESOURCES

In believing that employees are the organisation's most valuable resource and that all employees can experience problems of a personal and/or psycho-social nature at some stage, the wellbeing of the employee is paramount to the effective, efficient functioning of the organisation.

The impact of a variety of psycho-social effects in the community have a direct influence on the individual, his/her family structure, and his/her environment. This, combined with personality and behavioural factors, can have a marked influence on the individual's performance in the work environment.

In believing that employees are the organisations most valuable resource and that their wellbeing is paramount, the Employee Wellbeing Programme needs to provide a professional and confidential service, working from both an organisational and individualised intervention perspective .

The activities of the EWP aim at achieving an improvement of functioning of all employees on a personal psycho-social level within all strata of the organisation. This improved functioning forms the basis of the notion of a functional employee being a productive employee. The EWP adds value to the functioning of the organisation and aims at changing the mindset of the organisation from that of the employee as a commodity to the employee as a person.

The EWP addresses the organisation on 3 levels.

Micro level interventions aim at addressing individual persons problems, issues and /or concerns through individualised curative and preventative approaches. Through addressing these issues, the individual is able to function more effectively and hence, perform better within their work situation.

Mezzo level interventions aim at addressing group / section problems and concerns and focus on improving relationships and communication within the specific group environment through the use of groups and specific structured intervention. Through addressing these issues, the groups are able to function more effectively, are more united in purpose and goal, and hence perform better within their work situation

Macro level interventions aim at addressing problems, concerns and issues at branch and organisational level. Through addressing these issues on a broad base, it is envisaged to develop the branch as a whole and minimise/ remove the effect of these problems on the functioning of the branch.

While the primary focus of the EWP is Macro (organisationally focussed) the EWP works in the broader community of other professional bodies in other organisations and the community as a whole, and hence can not isolate itself from the environmental level and environmental influences. An environmental perspective needs to be developed where contact and good relations are maintained with community peers who include the other municipal local authorities and a number of other corporate setups, eg. Eskom (whose power station is within the local authority area).

Areas of cooperation could be investigated between the local authority EWP/ EAP structures for common interests, serving the whole metro interests.

INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EWP AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The EWP functions most effectively within the domain of Human Resources as it occupies a role which is preventative, curative and developmental in nature. The primary goal of the EWP is the development of all employees. Human Resources is ultimately tasked with this role in the organisation.

EWP is further a discipline which has strong bonds with organisational development actions. It concerns itself with the wellbeing of the individual and the group and the organisational structure.

The following relationships can be observed:

1. *Training and Development*. The EWP functions as both a user of training services, as well as identifying needs for training, and using training for customer (both individual and corporate) development. The EWP also is capable of supplying specific behavioural training, and as such may act as a training provider.
2. *Industrial Relations*. The EWP recognises and consults with Industrial Relations regarding industrial relations issues. Industrial relations further refers persons to the EWP for assessment and treatment following issues being identified through the disciplinary process, where EWP intervention would be advantageous
3. *Safety*. The EWP relates to the safety division as a source for the receipt of referrals to EWP. It is also under the auspices of the Occupational Health and Safety Act that the EWP can claim to be responsible for the maintenance of the "occupational psycho-social health" of the work force and hence hold some level of relationship to safety.
4. *Organisation and Work study*. The EWP makes use of O&W for the changing of broad structural systems within the organisation when addressing macro problems. It uses the advice of O&W for organisational development exercises.
5. *Recruitment/Selection and Information Management*. The EWP makes

use of information gathered by this section to identify trends in individual and group attendance patterns, to gain additional personal information and to be informed of trends within the organisation

LINK OF ACTIVITIES OF EWP TO OTHER HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTIONS

The EWP, while not always able to link its functions directly with the rest of Human Resources, still maintains a large number of direct ties to the other functions within Human Resources. Use is made of functions such as O&W to facilitate changes within broad organisational interventions, information management can supply information and staff trends, safety can liaise and set some broad common goals. The closest link is observable in Human Resources with the training field as both a support/ provision system and as a supplier of specific services to training.

Within a systemic perspective of Human Resources, EWP forms a complementary component of the whole system. Its involvement with many of the other functions makes it a part of the integral Human Resources perspective. While it is not always transparent to the Human Resources system, its impact can be observed in a long term perspective, particularly in a person centred Human Resources perspective.

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES WITHING THE HUMAN RESOURCES FUNCTION

Health and Safety

THE COMMON FOCUS OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES GROUP

is to act as facilitators, to assist management and employees by working as a group, to reach a common goal

THE PURPOSE OF THE SAFETY FUNCTION

is to effectively manage the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHASA) through the following :-

- orientating the strategic management team, directors and managers regarding the key concepts contained in the Act (OHASA sections 8 and 16(2));
- identifying safety representatives per department (OHASA sections 17 and 18);
- training safety representatives in order to equip them for their goals (OHASA sections 8, 17 and 18);
- designing and implementing a performance management system to effectively monitor the safety situation in the organisation;
- investigating serious injuries and ensuring that the necessary documentation is completed (the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act);
- controlling the completion of the injury on duty (IOD) claim forms and forwarding the same to the Compensation Commissioner (COIDA);
- investigating the scene of motor vehicle accidents and submitting the necessary claim forms to treasury.

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AND HUMAN RESOURCES

is as follows :

- Manager : Human Resources : To lead and advise where necessary
- Training and Development : The safety function relies greatly on training of employees, section 8 of the OHASA clearly indicates that all employees must be trained.
- Employee Wellbeing : The safety function and the employee wellbeing programme are closely related by the OHASA, and referrals evolving from discussions at safety committees are passed on to EWP.
- Industrial Relations : The occupational safety committees refer cases to industrial relations via the relevant managers for action.

- Organisation and Workstudy : Occupational safety makes use of the O&WS for advice on organisational development
- Recruitment and Information Management: Occupational safety makes use of personal information needed to complete employer's reports that must be forwarded to the Compensation Commissioner, information to compile statistics for reports, and to be informed of changes within the organisation.

THE LINK OF ACTIVITIES OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY TO OTHER HUMAN RESOURCES FUNCTIONS

The occupational safety section is able to link its activities to the other Human Resources functions by passing on information, referrals and receiving information and assistance in return, thereby making it easier to facilitate the OHASA.

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES WITHIN THE HUMAN RESOURCES FUNCTION

Recruitment and Selection

THE COMMON FOCUS OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES GROUP

The focus of the Human Resources group can be seen as the rendering of a professional personnel service to the internal employees / directorates / departments. The rendering of an external service to people, companies, etc. should also not be forgotten. It is always recommended that a Human Resources group must strive to deliver excellent service to both clients.

On what must we focus ?

The focus should be on a multi-informative approach based on :

- personnel administration i.e. medical and pension matters, leave, housing subsidies, etc.
- recruitment and selection
- employee training
- health and safety
- labour relations
- employee well being
- work study

This approach can help towards the achieving of an informative personnel corps. Thus, a closer working relationship should be established between the responsible persons of the various functions as mentioned above. This does not necessarily mean that the staff should get flexible regarding the personnel functions.

The question of what we want, i.e. do we want flexible (generalist) or specialists for the Human Resources group, still needs to be answered.

Currently, the main focus should be on the **CURRENT REALITY WITHIN OUR OFFICE AND HOW WE PLANNED TO WORK IN THE FUTURE.**

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR SPECIFIC FUNCTION. RE-THINK HOW YOUR ACTIVITIES ARE A MEANS TO AN END - WHAT END ?

Purpose : To render an effective recruitment and selection function.

The primary function is to ensure that our municipality gets the best candidate in vacant positions. This involves the advertising of posts, short listing, interview processes, etc.

WHAT IS THE INTERRELATIONSHIP AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCY OF YOUR SPECIFIC FUNCTION WITH THE OTHER FUNCTIONS WITHIN HUMAN RESOURCES ?

Interrelationship with training (Tracey - induction) and labour relations (Pieter - disputes regarding appointments).

Functional interdependency - responsible for recruitment and selection. Rely on work study section regarding the advertising of posts.

HOW CAN YOU MORE CLEARLY LINK YOUR ACTIVITIES TO THE OTHER FUNCTIONS WITHIN HUMAN RESOURCES?

Linking of Activities

Manager :	Informing the work study section of vacant positions / requests of posts to be advertised. The personnel officer should be advised when to advertise, thus the informing of vacant positions should be linked.
Work Study :	Providing the personnel officer with all the relevant information regarding the identified posts, i.e. post level, salary scale, post numbers, etc.
Personnel Adman :	Drawing of appointment letters, informing of candidates (whether successful or not).
Training :	The personnel officer to notify, via the personnel admin. section, training of all new employees for induction.
Labour Relations :	Informing the personnel officer of dates for local bargaining forums. The handling of disputes / grievances should be linked as the personnel officer should provide all the relevant information.

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES WITHIN THE HUMAN RESOURCES FUNCTION

Training and Development

COMMON FOCUS FOR THE HUMAN RESOURCES GROUP

The role of Human Resources in an organisation is to enhance people management skills throughout the organisation, by :

- providing relevant knowledge and expertise to advise and guide line managers; and
- ensuring that line management are equipped with the required skills training

Only by empowering line management through the dissemination of knowledge and the development of skills applicable for their functions, will Human Resources be able to contribute to the overall service delivery of the organisation in a meaningful way.

In order to provide a holistic and complete service to the organisation, both specialist and generalist Human Resources skills are required. A common focus must be shared by the team, who should work in a mutually dependent manner in order to ensure consistency throughout the organisation.

The Human Resources support function should take into account individual employees' needs, management's expectations and society's requirements (i.t.o. the external environment) in order to assist the organisation to achieve optimal effectiveness.

THE PURPOSE OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of training and development is to liaise with line management in order to accomplish the following :

- the development of education, training and development related policies in line with national directives/ legislation and organisational objectives;
- the identification and prioritisation of training needs (behavioural and technical);
- ensuring that the right employees attend the right training (i.t.o. content and quality - this implies the evaluation of training providers in line with national directives, as well as a clear understanding of the training need);
- the sharing of knowledge regarding current and pending legislation and trends within the field of personnel development and related activities.

Planned development programmes will return values to the organisation in terms of increased productivity, heightened morale, decreased absenteeism, reduced costs and greater organisational stability and flexibility to adapt to changing external requirements.

INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCY OR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT WITH OTHER FUNCTIONS IN HUMAN RESOURCES

No specific Human Resources function can operate without the input and cooperation of other Human Resources functions. Training cannot be carried out in isolation.

Interrelationships and interdependency can be described as follows :

Recruitment and Selection

Feedback is required from the recruitment and selection specialist in order to identify specific training needs at the time of appointment and in order to provide career development.

Training and development can also ensure specific training for recruitment and selection specialists , management and unions in terms of recruitment and selection techniques.

Administration

An induction programme is offered by training and development for all new employees - the information regarding these employees must be furnished by administration. Details regarding changes in Conditions of Service, benefits offered, etc. which impact on the content of the induction programme, should also be forwarded to training and development.

Liaison between training and development and administration takes place on a regular basis regarding study allowances and study leave applications, increments for completed studies, etc. Information regarding completed studies or training courses can also be fed into the data system to keep track of skills levies within the organisation.

Industrial Relations

Grievances and disciplinary procedures may uncover specific or general training needs which need to be communicated to training and development. Specific training needs regarding labour relations can also be identified and accommodated through specific training courses.

Safety

Training and development acts as a support to safety with regards to the training of health and safety representatives, first aid training and other required training in terms of the OHASA Act.

Organisation and Work Study

Training needs that have arisen as a result of internal restructuring initiatives need to be brought to the attention of training and development. In terms of career development, liaison needs to take place with regards to the specific requirements and key performance areas of functional posts within the organisation, thus allowing for the

sufficient planning of an individual's career.

Employee Well Being

The link between EWP is two-fold : as a facilitator of training identified by interventions carried out by EWP, and in the use of EWP as a training provider in terms of training, such as stress management courses.

Numerous requests for training are unclear, and investigations may show that training may not be the answer. In this case, often organisational development processes are required to correctly identify the problems encountered in the workplace. Thus, a close relationship between EWP and training is encouraged.

Note

Training is a support function not only for Human Resources' clients, but within Human Resources itself. Without continuous communication and a common understanding of each other's functions as well as Human Resources' role within the organisation, the training and development function cannot be effective.

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCIES WITHING THE HUMAN RESOURCES FUNCTION

Labour Relations

COMMON FOCUS OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES GROUP

- to facilitate and improve management and team work within the organisation;
- manage people related processes and recognise that workers are Human Beings, more than mere "units of labour" with human needs that require attention;
- to get results through people

PURPOSE OF LABOUR RELATIONS

- creating and facilitating better cooperation between parties in the operational process;
- work place democracy - modern work force demands consultation and real participation in decision making;
- link between workers and management - needs the trust of both sides.

INTERRELATIONSHIP / FUNCTIONAL INTERDEPENDENCY

- the functional components are so inter-linked that one can only achieve goals if the others achieve theirs. All of us must work with one purpose in mind - a common focus. The team building exercises are, therefore, necessary.

LINK LABOUR RELATIONS ACTIVITIES WITH OTHERS

- sub-discipline of the Human Resources function;
- sound labour relations forms the basis for other activities within the Human Resources Department to be effective.

BIGGER PICTURE

- to enable change and to create a workplace that motivates and satisfies employees so as to attain the necessary cooperation and commitment.

**ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
ANNEXURE "2"**

**SUMMARY OF A MEETING HELD BETWEEN THE UNIONS (SAMWU AND IMATU)
WITH REGARDS TO THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCESS HELD ON 15
AND 23 MARCH 1999**

Present

B J Gouws	Manager : Human Resources
A Kermis	Personnel Officer
T Olivier	Contract - Recruitment & Selection
L Hendricks	SAMWU
M Saligee	SAMWU
R Riddle	IMATU
J Smit	IMATU

1. **Background**

The Manager : Human Resources explained that the purpose of the meeting was to evaluate our existing recruitment and selection process for the purpose of :

- implementing a sustainable quality management recruitment and selection system and process to ensure that staff with the necessary experience and/or potential competencies and skills are appointed
- ensuring a fair and transparent recruitment and selection process and system
- ensuring a support system for internal staff who were not successful in their applications to assist them to develop themselves

2. **The following issues were raised and discussed :**

2.1 **Issues relating to the selection process.**

- 2.1.1 To what extent we actually evaluate the necessary skills and competencies during the selection process.
- 2.1.2 Management does not really analyse their posts for the identification of the necessary competencies and skills.
- 2.1.3 The present shortlisting method is not contributing to achieving a quality management selection system and process as the shortlisting panel does not

identify possible conduct based on competencies and skills.

- 2.1.4 Some managers change the advertised selection criteria after posts have been advertised. They do not stick to the recruitment and selection criteria.
- 2.1.5 Conflict exists between the issues of potential and experience. The aspect of potential is neglected.
- 2.1.6 Does the selection panel have the necessary knowledge and skills to make competent and defensible selections?
- 2.1.7 Certain managers go into the selection process already knowing who they want to appoint.
- 2.1.8 Human Resources should have more say in the final assessment of candidates.
- 2.1.9 The existing paradigm of management that only the best candidate has to be appointed ignores the element of potential.
- 2.1.10 The selection system and process does not contribute to the development of our internal staff.
- 2.1.11 The aspect of relevant qualifications and experience specifically with regards to internal and external candidates.
- 2.1.12 What is the role of the Unions in the selection process? Is it necessary that they also have to evaluate the candidates?
- 2.1.13 The Unions are supposed to evaluate the fairness of the recruitment and selection processes. What constitutes a fair recruitment and selection process?
- 2.2 Issues relating to administrative arrangements
 - 2.2.1 Are candidates being given sufficient time to prepare themselves for their interviews?
 - 2.2.2 How many applicants should be invited for the interview?
 - 2.2.3 Where do we have to advertise posts - internally or externally? What is prescribed in the National Affirmative Action agreement?
 - 2.2.4 What is the understanding regarding internal candidates? Does it include

contract workers?

- 2.2.5 Disputes - how much time should be given for disputes? Can management go ahead with appointments if there is a dispute?
- 2.2.6 Closing date of advertisements. Until which time can a person be considered for an advertised post?
- 2.2.7 Do we acknowledge receipt of applications?
- 2.2.8 Venues for interviews - this has to be as close as possible to the location of the workplace for the vacant post.
- 2.2.9 How many representatives of the Union are allowed to be present at the interviews?
- 2.2.10 The practice that applicants submit their applications to their managers as well as handing it in at different offices is creating problems as some applications get lost in the process.

FOCUS GROUP

ISSUES RELATING TO RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

- ▶ There is uncertainty relating to criteria used for selection.
- ▶ Various members of the panel assess you. How do you ensure consistency within the panel?
- ▶ With reference to the aspect of experience, external staff with less experience are appointed above internal staff with more experience. How do my years of experience weigh up against the other person's?
- ▶ Competencies and skills versus qualifications and experience.
- ▶ Feedback after interviews :
 - Who is responsible for informing the successful and unsuccessful candidates?
 - What is the time frame for informing successful or unsuccessful candidates - there is inconsistency in this regard.
- ▶ Advertisements - when do we advertise internally and when do we advertise externally?
- ▶ Qualifications required - in some advertisements the qualifications required were not correctly reflected.
- ▶ When is a post earmarked for an Affirmative Action candidate?
- ▶ Feedback after interviews - no one in Human Resources to give feedback. To whom are we going for feedback? There is no formal system in place for feedback.
- ▶ Who should ask the questions - Human Resources or the line manager?
- ▶ Sometimes it happens that candidates with less experience are being appointed.
- ▶ People get "labeled" in the organisation and this influences the judgement of the interview panel and assessing candidates. "Judge me more by my future than my past."
- ▶ Support before an interview - preparing internal candidates for interviews.
- ▶ The aspect of appointing family - is there a policy in this regard?

- ▶ Why is there a probation period of 6 months if there is no formal performance management system in place?
- ▶ What happens to my existing Conditions of Service if I am appointed in another post?
- ▶ Changing the qualification after the post has been advertised - can we do it?
- ▶ How do we justify the qualifications required for the different posts?
- ▶ Sometimes candidates at the interview get the idea that some managers have no idea what is expected from the specific post.

University of Cape Town

